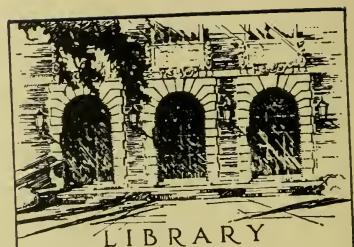

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by Frederick William Robinson

WOODLEIGH.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ONE AND TWENTY," "WILDFLOWER,"

"THE HOUSE OF ELMORE,"

&c.

"The wynde is greate upon the highest hylles,
The quiet lyfe is in the dale belowe,
Who treades on yse shall slyde against their wills,
They want not cares that curious artes would know.
Who lyues at ease and can content him so,
Is perfect wise, and sets bs all to schole,
Who hates this lore may well be called a foole."

A Myrrour for Magistrates, 1571.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Dedicated

TO

GEORGE FERGUSON, ESQ.

BY

HIS OLD FRIEND AND SCHOOLFELLOW,

THE AUTHOR.

BOOK I.

"Heyday, this gentleman speaks like a country parson."

HEYWOOD.

"*Snowb.*—What is this simpering? Where have you been? —what doing?"

"*Rosem.*—Been? Been to church, and been doing matrimony."

DOUGLAS JERROLD.

WOODLEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

IS STRICTLY CONFINED TO PIOUS PEOPLE.

I WAS fast asleep in the corner of our little pew, and good Mr. Parnell was in the middle of his sermon, and my mother with her hands crossed in her lap—and her lap full of hymn-books, smelling salts, a pair of silver spectacles, and a white pocket-handkerchief—was listening attentively, when a tall high-shouldered being clamped into chapel, looked round for a vacant seat, opened the door of our pew, took his place between me and my mother, and woke me up by fumbling under the seat for a place for his hat.

When he was comfortably settled and listening with his head on one side to the fifteenth part of the discourse, I, heaven forgive me, more interested in the intruder than the preacher, took a deliberate survey of him. He was fifty years of age to begin with; he had a grey unornamental patch of whisker on each cheek, a wrinkled face, a good sized nose, large bloodshot eyes, five teeth in the top row and four in the bottom, all yellow;—*ergo* he was not handsome.

He wore a long, ill-fitting black coat, his gloves were a doubtful pair, there was a darn on his waistcoat, and one of the knees of his trousers had been fine-drawn;—*ergo* he was not rich.

He was very dusty; all the creases of his coat were full of dust; there was dust on his boots, on his waistcoat, on his gloves, on the grey patches of whisker, and in among the whity-brown hair;—*ergo*, he was a traveller.

Who was he?—what was he?—what did he want in Nettleton?—what made him come to chapel at twenty minutes to eight o'clock?

I did not go to sleep again—I sat and

watched him. My mother, immovable as Fate, retained her old position, kept her black eyes fixed on the Reverend Mr. Parnell, and did not even glance out of the corners of them at the stranger. Neighbors who were more inquisitive stared a little at him, and Mrs. Jinks, the pew-opener, who sat on a stool in the aisle, squinted curiously from under her green shade.

It was summer time—the middle of summer, before the days "draw in," or flowers think of fading; a bright evening when the rural town of Nettleton was in its Sunday best, and the green leaves of Nettleton woods were rustling skittishly and flirting with the zephyrs. A quiet Sabbath evening, the hour half-past seven, the chapel windows open, a wasp buzzing in and out and making impetuous bobs at Mrs. Jinks, the blue sky deepening, the red and golden glories in the west becoming fainter, Mr. Parnell ambling on leisurely to seventeenthly and lastly.

The dusty stranger paid Mr. Parnell every attention, was evidently as rapt a listener as my mother. Once, on Mr. Parnell's allusion

to the text, he took my pocket-bible from the pew-rest, and with a rapidity that surprised me, skimmed over the leaves, found the verse, perused it, and replaced the book. Once he looked round the chapel—on an emergency it might have accommodated a hundred persons—and once he stood up, leaned into the next pew, and tapped an old gentleman on the head, Mr. Rigden, the saddler, and an influential member of the congregation, who was going to sleep as fast as he could manage it.

Mr. Parnell having concluded his sermon with a blessing and a pat on the cushion, there was an opening of pew-doors, a shuffling of feet, and an end to the evening service.

My mother lingered to the last—it was a habit of hers which extremely annoyed me—and the third occupant of our pew lingered also, and leaned back in his seat with a weary expression of countenance.

He was the first to rise though, and to murmur a "Thank you" to my mother—for the loan of the pew I suppose—as he stepped into the narrow aisle, and walked briskly, not

towards the entrance, but towards the minister's room at the end of the chapel.

When my mother and I were going down the hill to Nettleton—quaint old town that has known no change since the days of King Charles of blessed memory, that is nine miles from a railway station, and fifty miles from London—I ventured to disturb the current of ideas.

"I wonder who that chap is now?"

"Chap, Robert!"

"That chap who came into our pew, mother—do you know him?"

"No, my dear. I never saw him before."

"It was nobody who belonged to Nettleton, for—"

"Robert dear, haven't you anything better to talk about?—What was the text this evening?"

"The text did you say, mother?"

My mother *did* say text.

"Oh! let me see. The thirteenth chapter—the thirteenth—no—the thirty-first chapter of Joshua, and the—"

"I don't think there are thirty-one chapters

in Joshua, Robert," my mother observed quietly.

"There are in Jeremiah, then — it *was* Jeremiah, wasn't it?"

"Yes," sighed my mother.

"Of course it was. The thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah, and the—did you see his hat, mother?"

"My dear, it's Sunday!"

My mother, though a true daughter of Eve, was never curious on Sundays. Moreover, my mother had a strict methodist reverence for Sunday, she abjured the world, its pomps and vanities on that day, she went morning, afternoon and evening to the little chapel on the hill, she had prayers before breakfast and prayers after supper, and cold meat for dinner always. With a pious mother I ought to have grown up more reverent and docile, but then she was a gentle, warm-hearted mother, too, and let me have more of my own way than was good for me. She was only severe on Sabbath days, and therefore I was always glad when Monday morning came, and I could go back to day-school, to my games

in the playground and my races home again, over Nettleton Common.

Heigho! this memory of the past may be very well in a story-book or sentimental ballad, very well for sober-minded, steady old gentlemen, whose jog-trot lives have had nothing remarkable in them, one way or another, who have had no trials or temptations to withstand or give way to, who have seen the sun rise on their fortunes and known not its setting, but for Robert Woodleigh, one of the ne'er-do-well's, a rambler and a scapegrace—your humble servant, reader—it's not half so pleasant.

"My dear, it's Sunday!" There was no occasion to enlighten me on that point, I knew it well enough. The twenty or thirty shops comprising Nettleton town were tightly shut—with the exception of the Bell Inn, which my mother passed with upturned eyes —there were some grand people, the Squire of Nettleton and his lady, Lawyer Martin, his wife and children, Doctor Wisby and his grown-up daughters, coming down the High Street, where the church stood; there were no boys

playing in the roads, and everyone was clean, and prim, and pious.

When we were at home in our front parlor, I was still conscious it was Sunday; there was my cricket-bat neglected in the corner, and there was Nettleton Common, where I always played, only a few yards off, and no one on it but two gipsy-boys, a flock of geese, and a meditative cow.

My mother opened the Bible at that chapter of Jeremiah which I had nearly forgotten, and pushed it across the table to me. I turned my eyes from Nettleton Common—forbidden ground on that particular day—and read the Bible to my mother till the night set in and the stars came out, and my mother was afraid I should ruin my eyes reading in the gloaming.

When the blind was drawn, and two lights set on the table—two lights always on a Sunday evening—my mother, leaving me to my Biblical researches, put on her silver spectacles—she had a weak sight for a woman of forty—and took up a book of Devotional Exercises, very profitable reading, but very

dry, for even my mother succumbed and closed her eyes. I looked at the Family Bible, then at the ceiling, then at the candle, which I snuffed, then at the queer-shaped cabinet in the corner, then at the Bible again, the leaves of which I turned, till I came to the last—the fly-leaf, on which was an interesting chronicle that had been often spelt over.

There were half-a-dozen Robert Woodleighs' names on that page—Robert Woodleighs who were dead and buried, one of them my father, who had died six years ago, at the age of forty-five. The last name on the list, written in my father's best small-hand, referred to the unworthy chronicler of this history.

"*Robert Woodleigh, born November 16th,* 1827." So I was going on for fourteen in the year of grace one thousand eight hundred and forty-one, getting "such a big boy," according to my mother, and "such a bad boy," according to my neighbors.

My mother was right, and my neighbors, at that time, were wrong. I had certainly a fair share of animal spirits, gave them play at unseasonable times, was not a particularly

civil lad, in fact rather partial to the last word with my seniors, broke a few windows occasionally in the High Street,—which windows mother paid for, so there was no harm done,—fought with my neighbors' sons when they wanted to "bounce over me," fought twice with Squire Heberdeen's son, who was always interfering with the boys of the town, and sent him home the second time with a black eye he ought to have been proud of; but as for being a bad boy then, I solemnly deny it.

There were seven more names on the worn fly-leaf, names of near relations whom it was likely I should never see again.

"*James Woodleigh, born December 4th,* 1790, *married June* 21*st,* 1820." He was my father's brother, and had been, once upon a time, my father's partner. The business prospered after Robert Woodleigh's decease; and had my father died five years later, it is possible he would have left a rich widow behind him, instead of a middle-aged, pretty-faced relict with exceedingly limited means.

Here followed a list of cousins — always the chief attraction for me on that page. I spelled the names over every Sunday evening when my mother, tired with three journeys to chapel and a strong dose of devotional exercises after them, was nodding in her chair. These were my imaginary histories that set me brooding many an hour, and conjuring up a series of fancy portraits.

Caroline Woodleigh, born Jan. 2nd, 1822.

Richard Woodleigh, born Mar. 15th, 1823.

Upton Woodleigh, born May 4th, 1826.

Constance Woodleigh, born Feb. 28th, 1828.

Mary Woodleigh, born Dec. 23rd, 1834.

John Woodleigh, born Dec. 23rd, 1834.

This completed the list—my father died in eighteen hundred and thirty-five, and no more was known of his kinsmen. James Woodleigh went up in the world, and Robert Woodleigh's widow went down; one went to the east and the other to the west; one stayed in London, the other in Nettleton; there was an end to all correspondence—what was a brother's wife who was in needy circumstances to James

Woodleigh, contractor, railway carrier, &c., &c., &c.

"Rap—*rap*—RAP."

My mother sprang to her feet, sat down again, and stared at me in an absent manner.

"Is that a knock, Robert, my dear?"

"Yes, mother."

"Who it can be at this time of night—Sunday too!"

I glanced at the names before me.

"It can't be uncle James, or—or any of my cousins, I should think!"

"Had you not better go to the door and see, my dear?" said my mother, startled at my observation, but trying to appear as unconcerned as possible.

I went out of the room and into the narrow passage. My mother kept no servant, and I was general attendant in leisure hours. The person outside was thinking of knocking again, when, opening the door suddenly, I jerked the knocker from his hand and left him with an arm in the air like a statue.

The moon had risen and was shining full on

the door-step, therefore there was no difficulty in recognizing the dusty gentleman who had arrived at so late an hour to evening service. There he stood, with his hat on the back of his head, and a diminutive carpet-bag in his hand, peering in at the dark passage and endeavouring to distinguish some human being in the background.

"Is Mrs. Woodleigh within?" was the inquiry, made in a deep voice.

"Yes, she is," I replied with all the uncouthness of a boy of fourteen; "what do you want?"

"I wish to see her, if you please."

I ran to the parlor door.

"Mother, here's a man."

"Say gentleman, little boy," remarked the stranger on the door-step.

"Gentleman," I corrected almost involuntarily.

"Show him in, Robert."

My mother whipped the spectacles off her nose, and consigned them to the depths of a very long pocket, and I returned to the street-door.

"Mother says you are to come in. She's in the best room."

"Which is the best room, my lad?"

"The first door—mind my cricket-bat."

The stranger took off his hat, groped his way along the dark passage—I had quite forgotten the necessity for a light—and bent his ungainly form as he entered the room and made a bow to my mother.

"Take a seat, sir."

"Thank you, ma'am."

The man—or "gentleman," as he preferred it—took the first vacant chair and placed the carpet-bag at his feet, whilst I, keeping my eyes upon him, resumed my place before the family Bible.

My position caught his eye.

"Ah! reading your Bible, my man," said he; "a book you cannot begin too early, or leave off too late. What was Mr. Parnell's text, boy?"

"Thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah and the tenth verse," I answered quickly.

The stranger smiled approvingly. I think he would have patted me on the head if I had

given him any encouragement to take liberties. I looked askance at my mother, who did not seem particularly struck with my excellent memory.

"Your son, ma'am?" the stranger inquired.

"Yes, sir—my only one."

"A fine lad—how old is he?"

"Nearly fourteen."

"An age that requires watching—an age that receives every impression, good or bad, and moulds the character of the future man. I hope you take great care of him."

"To be sure, sir!" said my mother, bridling up.

"I hope you, sir," turning to me, "take care of your mother—study her comforts, honor her words, and obey her wishes. You will find it your greatest reproach in after life if you have disregarded her."

This was an extraordinary being. To walk into my mother's house late on Sunday night, take the first chair he could find, and begin talking like Mr. Parnell in his pulpit!

My mother softened towards the stranger

at hearing this address; I colored and she sighed. It was only yesterday that I had honored her words and obeyed her wishes by refusing to remain in doors, by rushing out on Nettleton Common to play with Tom Arrow — a rackety lad, whose father, the chemist, had been looking for him everywhere.

A pause. My mother waiting for the stranger's explanations, the stranger occupied in removing his very large and shabby gloves. He proceeded to enlighten us at last.

"My name, Mrs. Woodleigh, is Bowden— a friend of your worthy pastor, Mr. Parnell."

"Oh, indeed," said my mother, looking with intentness at the speaker.

"Important business demanding Mr. Parnell's presence in London for some six or seven weeks, I have come to Nettleton as his unworthy substitute."

"Oh! indeed," said my mother, a second time.

"I have been preaching at Wolverby this morning, madam."

"This morning, sir!" exclaimed my mother,

—Wolverby was twenty-one miles from Nettleton.

"Yes, and being anxious to reach this town in time for my reverend friend's evening discourse, I did not flinch at a walk of twenty miles. It is a long walk though, and," glancing at his boots, "a very dusty road."

I began to guess the object of his visit.

"Being an entire stranger in Nettleton, and having an objection to lodgings at a public house, I have been forced to solicit the advice of Mr. Parnell. Mr. Parnell having a large family and a small house, cannot offer me the shelter of his roof, and has kindly recommended your apartments to me. You have a bed-room and sitting-room to let, I believe?"

"I am afraid it is—"

"My dear madam," interrupted he, "pray do not pain me by apologies; the apartments will suit me, I am sure. I am only ashamed to enter them upon a Sunday evening — to speak of them on such a day. I shall not require much attendance, and shall give but little trouble," continued he, "so

you will not find me an unpleasant lodger—but—"

He put a large brown hand to his mouth and coughed.

"—But we will not speak of worldly matters now, madam, only it may be as well to add that I am a poor man—a poor teacher of the Word—and, and—apartments are not expensive at Nettleton, I suppose?"

"Very moderate, sir," my mother replied; "there is no demand for lodgings in the town."

"It is a pretty place, too," he answered; "and what a pleasure it is to see our persuasion holds its ground here."

"A pleasure and a comfort, sir."

Mr. Bowden did not appear particularly struck with the response; he fell into a reverie, and my mother taking this opportunity of retiring from the room, went upstairs to look to his apartments.

Mr. Bowden was tired and sleepy, as well as thoughtful, for my mother had not quitted the parlor five minutes before his head dived to the right, dived to the left, nearly jerked itself

off backwards, nearly fell into his lap forwards, and finally rested on his rusty black stock, in a position of profound repose. I sat and stared at him over the leaves of the great Bible, and thought he was a very plain man, and wondered if I should look as ugly when I got as old; wondered, too, why he had taken to preaching for his living, and if preaching were so bad a speculation, why he did not give it up and take to something else.

Mr. Bowden began to snore, and that frightened me. I had never heard such a noise in my life, it was a rasping, choking, gurgling noise, that alarmed even my mother, and brought her down from the first-floor to see what was the matter.

"It's only Mr. Bowden, mother. He has gone to sleep."

"Oh, dear! I thought he was in a fit."

"Isn't it awful?" I asked, in a confidential whisper.

"Hush, Robert my dear," said my mother; "the gentleman is fatigued."

Mr. Bowden opened his eyes, looked for a

moment vacantly at us both, then rose slowly to his feet.

"Your pardon, Mrs. Woodleigh," he said, "I fear my long walk has been too much for me. With your permission I will retire to my room."

"Have you supped, sir?"

"Thank you, yes. I supped with Mr. Parnell."

He took up his carpet-bag, and proceeded to follow my mother to his room.

"Good night, my lad," he said to me, as he retired.

"Good night, sir."

When my mother had returned, and we were supping together in the front parlor, I reverted again to the stranger.

"He don't seem like a minister to me, mother."

"You should never judge a man by his looks, Robert."

"Who would have thought of those upstairs rooms being let to-night?" said I, "why, we've had the bill about them in the window till it has got as brown as—as," a bright

simile suggested itself, "as Mr. Bowden's hat!"

"I wish you would not talk in that manner, Robert," said my mother, gravely; "honest poverty is no fit subject for a jest."

"I really was not jesting, mother," I replied; "his hat *is* brown, you know—it's all true enough. I should like to know if he is—"

"Don't be curious, Robert," interrupted my mother; "curiosity has led many an erring mortal from the narrow path—I wonder what Mr. Parnell is going to London for!"

Supper at an end, and the front parlor window fastened — not that there was occasion to fasten anything in Nettleton — mother and I went upstairs to our rooms.

As we neared Mr. Bowden's apartments, my mother raised her finger by way of caution, and fearful of disturbing the stranger's rest, we trod more softly past the door. He was not asleep though, he was either talking to himself or praying, for as we crossed the landing, we heard him say:—

"And God bless and forgive her, and turn her heart towards me!—Amen."

"Amen, poor gentleman!" whispered my mother to herself, as we went lightly up the next flight of stairs.

CHAPTER II.

MR. BOWDEN.

In my opinion, Mr. Bowden did not improve upon acquaintance. He was a very good man in his way. I believe no one disputed that fact to the last day of his life; but he was no more a cheerful man to speak to than he was a nice man to look at. There was something stern and cold about him, which had a depressing effect on my youthful spirits, and the habit that he had of preaching at all times and seasons, was rather aggravating. I detected these striking points of his character before the Sunday came on which he was to deliver his first sermon to the Net

tleton Methodists. And what a sermon that was, and how it astonished all the congregation, including my mother, and what a poor light of grace Mr. Parnell was considered ever afterwards!

Comparisons are odious; but even I—a small Methodist item—could not help being struck by the difference between Mr. Parnell and his successor *pro tem.* Mr. Parnell's discourse was quiet, easy, and uncommonly soothing. Mr. Bowden's was a red-hot, tearing piece of earnestness, which startled every sinner into attention, and made havoc on his conscience. Mr. Parnell, a little fat, white-haired man, used to stand exactly in the centre of the pulpit, clasp his dumpy hands together, and prose away till a quarter to one. Mr. Bowden danced from one side of the pulpit to the other, banged with his fist on the cushion, frothed at the mouth like a maniac, and told us his mind as though he meant it. The afternoon witnessed a second specimen of extempore preaching in the same style, and in the evening two or three church-people who had heard of his per-

formances came sneaking into our little chapel to judge for themselves.

"He's a wonderful man," said my mother, as we walked slowly towards home that Sunday evening, "a most wonderful man!"

I was silent.

"What do you think of him, Robert?" asked my mother.

"He is not like Mr. Parnell."

"No, dear, but what do you think of him?"

"He's a very good man, mother, I daresay, but I wouldn't be that pulpit-cushion for any money!"

"Robert, Robert!" said my mother, half-inclined to cry, "I wish there were more reverence in you. I'm afraid playing so often on the Common does a deal of harm."

"No it don't, mother. I like Mr. Bowden's preaching, I do, indeed — what I can understand of it. I did not shut my eyes once, and generally I am a little sleepy of a Sunday."

"Ah! my son, you will know better some day."

My mother had great faith in the future. She was always looking forward to the "some day" that never came! When my father was living, what visions she had had of his making a fortune, and what a comforter, with all her day-dreams, she had been to him! Sanguine in everything, she was looking forward still to her husband's brother and his family, hoping that the Mr. James Woodleigh, who ignored her existence, would do something "some day" for herself or her child. I need not say she was building a large castle in the clouds for that child. He was to be a wonderful man, make a great deal of money, be the best and most affectionate of sons, and a great and perpetual comfort to her all the rest of her days.

Well, such a disposition of mind is not the worst gift in the world; it consoles the possessor for the minor troubles of life, and though now and then the dreamer comes with a crash to the earth, still the future is for ever before him and there is no tax on cloudland at present.

To return to Mr. Bowden. The six weeks of

his stay at Nettleton were not without their fruit. He stirred up the drowsy Methodists of Mr. Parnell's chapel, he taught them much that was their duty, and he induced a few of the lower orders, rough beings who had never been able to stand preaching in their lives, to come and listen to him through windows and half-opened doors.

The people of Nettleton, who seldom took kindly to a stranger, and were generally anxious to know his birth, family, and antecedents, the extent of his income, and his reason for troubling the town with his presence before they patronized him, became reconciled to Mr. Bowden's appearance in their midst, gave him "good morning" when he crossed their paths, and touched their hats occasionally. For twenty miles round Nettleton he was well known too; he was a famous walker, and three or four times a-week he would startle the inhabitants of some out-of-the-way village by delivering a sermon to them on any plot of ground that was handy for the purpose. He was not always successful with his sermons or visitings; at times

he was left on the field with his stool, his pocket Bible, and one or two gaping children; more than once some hardened navvy to whom he was anxious to offer spiritual consolation kindly suggested throwing him out of window, and now and then an ungodly few would object to the very hard names bestowed upon them and begin to giggle and shrug their shoulders irreverently; but on the whole he did some good, and if his success with the world were not commensurate with his expectations, why that's a disappointment that many poor wretches besides himself have experienced—the writer of this chronicle for one.

Mr. Bowden succeeded well enough in Nettleton, and although the town was not excited by his presence, yet he added a few converts to his flock and filled Nettleton Chapel every Sunday morning and evening. The afternoon service was a dull affair, even the majority of Methodists admired a little ease after dinner, and did not care for a walk up the hill with a lively sun on their backs all the way—it was a hindrance to digestion. My mother defied the long walk, the

sun, and her digestive organs, and went with her boy to Nettleton Chapel on Sunday afternoons, and Mr. Bowden preached a sermon to her and me, three servant girls, a pious old man with an ear-trumpet, and the pew-opener.

At the expiration of six weeks, during which time Mr. Bowden's sermons, in my mother's opinion, had become quite heavenly, and Mr. Bowden himself, despite his shabby gloves and the darn on his knee, quite heavenly too, there came a letter, with the London post-mark, addressed to our reverend lodger.

It was a Thursday evening, and Mr. Bowden had not returned from a preaching mission at a market-town nine miles from Nettleton. It was a wet evening too, and there was every probability of Mr. Bowden coming back soaked, that gentleman having departed in the forenoon without an umbrella. There was a spirit of aggravation in the elements, for Mr. Bowden had only that morning speculated in a new hat, and gone out with it, quite the dandy.

My mother kept tripping up and down stairs—she was a light woman for her age—laying a fire in the little old-fashioned grate on the first floor, getting ready Mr. Bowden's only change of wearing apparel—oh! you should have seen his change of wearing apparel, my stars!—and placing his slippers before the chintz-covered easy-chair. I was occupied less busily; I was done up with the weather and the long confinement to the house. I walked upstairs several times, and looked in at Mr. Bowden's room to see how affairs were progressing. I went downstairs again, once by the natural way, and three times by the banisters, which were rickety; I looked out of the back-door at the water-butt which was running over, at the wash-house, the old pear-tree, the narrow plot of ground embellished with cabbages, scarlet-runners, and gooseberry-bushes, at the leaden sky above them all; I looked out of the front-door at Nettleton Common, and tried to think it was clearing up a bit over the hills, and could not do it, so shut the door and dawdled into the parlor—the back-parlor, not the best room

—and took up Mr. Bowden's letter, and played at skimming it across the room until I nearly knocked a blue and yellow shepherdess off the mantel-piece. After sitting on every chair and lying full length on the sofa, I got my school-bag, drew a chair to the table, laid out my books carefully, polished my slate with the sleeve of my jacket, opened Mr. Walkinghame at Barter, put one arm on the table, and my head on my arm, and went off into a refreshing sleep.

"Why, Robert!"

I opened my eyes—I could only have been asleep a minute; but it had somehow got very dark, and the rain was rattling down in fine style.

"Why, Robert!" repeated my mother, "you have never been asleep?"

"I have just this moment shut my eyes. Oh! isn't it wet?" said I, yawning fearfully; "oh! won't our lodger come home jolly damp!"

"I wish he *would* come home," said my mother in a fidgety manner.

"So do I. I want to go to bed."

"Have you learned your lesson, Robert?"

"Oh! yes; it's all right, mother."

I returned my books and slate to the depths of my green baize bag, and hung the bag behind the door. I had scarcely completed the operation when the well-known rap—*rap*—RAP of Mr. Bowden announced the return of the wandering Methodist.

Mr. Bowden entered the room in the dampest condition; he was glossy with wet; his clothes clung to him affectionately; his new hat was washed out of all shape, and there was a row of water-drops all round the brim.

Mr. Bowden took his hat off and surveyed it ruefully.

"What a very unpleasant evening we have had to be sure, Mrs. Woodleigh."

"We have, indeed, sir."

"But the rain will do a great deal of good. Thank the Lord for all His mercies. How the wheat will grow after this!"

"Have you walked all the way home, sir?" inquired my mother.

"No. I was fortunate enough to meet with Pierce, the corn-chandler, three miles

from Nettleton, and he brought me the rest of the way in his cart. He had no umbrella, but it was a very friendly action."

"Yes," said my mother, glancing at the muddy boots of Mr. Bowden, "and had you not better change your things at once, sir? You may catch a severe cold. There's a letter for you upstairs, sir. I have just put it on your table."

"Indeed," his color changing. "From London?"

"There is the London post-mark on it."

"Is the address in a delicate, fine running-hand?" he enquired anxiously, "as if—as if written by a lady?"

"Round-hand," said I, breaking in upon the dialogue, "with very large capitals."

"Not a running-hand?" he asked.

"Oh! no, sir; quite a sprawling hand."

Mr. Bowden walked thoughtfully from the room, leaving a puddle of rain-water in the middle of the carpet. Half an hour afterwards, when my mother had prepared his supper-tray, the door of his room was heard to

open, and a pair of shuffling feet to descend the stairs.

A tapping at the door.

"Are you engaged, Mrs Woodleigh?"

My mother actually blushed as she replied:—

"No, sir."

Mr. Bowden re-entered the room, letter in hand. Mr. Bowden, in his change of dress, looked like a lucifer merchant in rather reduced circumstances.

"This letter contains important tidings, Mrs. Woodleigh," said he; "and you, as a member of our congregation,—and as a valued friend of mine, I trust I may add, —are entitled to the first hearing."

My mother, all expectation, waited for Mr. Bowden to proceed. With my eyes and ears very wide open, I waited also.

"Were you aware of the motive for Mr. Parnell's visit to London, Mrs. W.?"

"No, sir."

"It was owing to the death of a relation of Mr. Parnell's—a relation with whom your pastor had been for many years past at

variance, certain differences in matters of religion being, I believe, the cause. It is a pity that religion, of all things in the world, should sometimes part the best of friends."

"It is, indeed, sir," said my mother.

"However, the relation did his duty at the last moment, and forgot not a deserving man. He bequeathed some seven thousand pounds to Mr. Parnell, and I think we may now venture to consider our friend in comfortable circumstances."

"Oh, dear me!" said my mother; "whoever could have thought it. Really I am very glad to hear it now."

And she was too—my full-hearted mother's eye sparkled, and she rubbed her hands together in the plenitude of her exhilaration. So my mother was not a person of common mind, you see, reader; for, though poor enough herself, she could take a pleasure in hearing of the success of her friends and her neighbors, which is not a weakness everybody indulges in, I can tell you.

"But I am sure you will regret to hear that our reverend friend's change of pros-

pects has brought about another change that will affect many in this little town. Mr. Parnell does not return to Nettleton."

"Not return to Nettleton," repeated my mother, without much expression of regret in her tone.

"He will become the minister of a chapel at the West-end of the town, — a large chapel where there is greater scope for his abilities."

I thought I heard Mr. Bowden sigh.

"I trust he may bring many erring souls to the knowledge of the truth."

"Amen," said Mr. Bowden.

"But," asked my inquisitive mother, "who will succeed Mr. Parnell in our little chapel— who will—ahem, do you think—?"

Mr. Bowden indulged in one of his grim smiles.

"Some members of our congregation, Mrs. Woodleigh, have been writing some flattering reports to Mr. Parnell concerning my unworthy self," he said; "Mr. Rigden, the saddler, amongst the rest."

Mr. Rigden was an influential member of

our sect, I have before observed; he had quite the ruling of Nettleton chapel, and a minister had never been appointed there without his will and consent having been previously obtained. He was one of the richest men in Nettleton, though he was a saddler, and quite a rival to Squire Heberdeen in the extent of his meadow land. His good word with the Methodist elect went a long way—it was a "Take-care-of-Dowb" sort of word, and was always followed by a significant result. Some words fall amongst thistles and get choked, but Mr. Rigden's were not of the number.

"There is no occasion, Mrs. Woodleigh, to disguise the fact that it would not only be a proud day for me to succeed Mr. Parnell, but that the salary, though a small one, would be also acceptable in the extreme," said he; "but I have not been what the world calls a lucky man, and misfortune has taught me the lesson not to build too much upon contingencies."

"I wish you every success, sir."

"Thank you, Mrs. Woodleigh."

"I am sure if the wishes of the congrega-

tion be taken into consideration, you are certain of the appointment, Mr. Bowden."

"Thank you, thank you again," said he, with another of his odd smiles; "you flatter me, Mrs. Woodleigh — nay more, you buoy me up with fallacies, and that will never do. I must be content with the result, whatever it may be. I think I have endured too many disappointments in my life to feel acutely now."

After a moment's silence, he thrust a letter into my mother's hands, saying :—

"You will read this. It is one of your pastor's true heart-speaking epistles, as gentle and devout as his good self. I should make a poor follower in his steps at Nettleton."

"Not at all, sir."

"But I am intruding too long on your patience, madam."

He made a movement to withdraw.

"Will you have up your supper-tray, now, sir?"

"Not to night, thank you. The wet weather, my long walk, or Mr. Parnell's letter, has robbed me of my appetite. Good night, Mrs. Woodleigh."

"Ahem!" coughed my mother, in an embarrassed manner; "I have left a box of Grook's pills on your toilet table. They are very good things for cold—quite a preventative of cold, in fact, sir."

Mr. Bowden thanked her, and retired.

My mother had great confidence in "Grook's Infallible Pills;" she believed them capable of curing all the ills that flesh is heir to—she consumed a great many herself, gave a great many to me in the spring and fall of the year, recommended them for all bruises and contusions, rheumatism, gout, spasms, and sprained ankles. She prepared them herself from an old recipe of her grandmother, who had married a Grook of Ashton-under-Lyne, and, although she compounded them with very great care, and took extraordinary pains to make them all of one size, yet it did not render them less nasty, and as I always caught the flavor of *my* pills, never being able to swallow them till the third effort—I did not wish myself in Mr. Bowden's slippers that night.

My mother snuffed the candle, put on her

silver spectacles, and opened Mr. Parnell's letter. After the perusal, she re-folded it carefully, restored her spectacles to the case, leaned her round little chin on her hand, and looked intently at the candle.

She fell into a brown study, and I sat and surveyed her drowsily. Heaven knows of what she was thinking — thought follows thought as wave follows wave, till the waters grow deep and bear us away from the present — but I startled her exceedingly twenty minutes afterwards, by saying:—

"A penny for your thoughts, mother?"

My mother jumped in her chair.

"Oh! dear, Robert," she cried, "you have quite startled me—how can you be so silly? Shall we have supper now?"

"I don't much care about it, mother," said I, wearily.

"Then I think it's time we went to bed. These warm, close evenings quite take away one's appetite. I don't feel very well—I think I'll have a Grook's pill myself, to-night."

CHAPTER III.

"REMEMBER, REMEMBER, THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER."

WHETHER Fortune were tired of teasing Mr. Bowden, or the tide in the affairs of men were setting for once in a favorable direction; whether Mr. Rigden's vote and interest carried all before it, or whether Grook's pill had, in some mysterious way, exercised its effect on the fortunes of Mr. Bowden, it is not in the power of the writer to affirm—certain it is that my mother's lodger was solicited by the Methodists of Nettleton to become their good and watchful shepherd, and was duly installed in that responsible post.

Mr. Bowden did not talk of changing his apartments, although Mrs. Parnell and children had vacated the cottage near the chapel and started for London to join the lucky legatee. He was comfortably quartered in the house that looked upon the Common, there were no household cares upon his mind, and the addition of some sixty-two pounds a-year to his income offered no temptation to extravagance.

Therefore he remained my mother's lodger, and the nine days' wonder of a new minister at Nettleton chapel passed away. The inauguration sermon was delivered, and Mr. Bowden settled down into quite an old inhabitant; little boys who met him in the green lanes, or in the quiet precincts of the town, no longer whispered in each other's ear "That be the Marthodeest parson, yonder!" but scraped with their feet and pulled at their front locks of hair, and gave him a "Good marning, sir."

Mr. Bowden, if elated by his good fortune, did not let his feelings master him; he was the same grave, strong-minded being, and the only change he exhibited was in a new suit of

broadcloth for Sunday wear, and uncommonly respectable he looked in it—I hardly knew him again.

Mr. Bowden having settled into a "permanency," my mother took a small specimen of humanity into her service as maid-of-all-work, which threw over the establishment quite an air of gentility. Mr. Bowden was "at home" at my mother's house—my mother had got used to all his ways and oddities; I was the only one to hold out—to feel that the minister was a stranger in the household, and that I should never be able to take kindly to him. With all his piety and earnestness, he had never won upon my heart; he had strange manners with him which I could not brook; he was too solemn and dictatorial; he was not a friend to youth, he could not sympathize with it. Moreover, I was a boy fond of my liberty, of my game on the green, of any game, in fact, that would keep me out of doors till nightfall, and Mr. Bowden, having serious objections to seeing boys idle one minute of their lives, was always remonstrating with my mother or me.

His arguments were good, he could quote some excellent texts respecting time, its value, and the evils of wasting it, &c., but I was a high-spirited lad—nay more, a head-strong, hot-tempered lad, and could not, at thirteen years of age, submit to dictation from a stranger, though he were even the preacher at Nettleton Chapel.

I think I may say here, without egotism, that I was a boy of some penetration, although probably as inconsiderate as most youths of my age. Assuredly I was not slow to detect certain changes of manner in Mr. Bowden towards my mother, certain varying shades of treatment adopted by my mother towards him.

Mr. Bowden came more often into the parlor, was more solicitous of my mother's advice concerning the management of his chapel, talked a great deal concerning his visiting duties and her own—for my mother had, even in Mr. Parnell's time, a certain number of the poor of Nettleton to attend, to help the distressed with the little money she could afford, and to read the Bible to

those who were too ill or too ignorant to read for themselves.

When it came to *every* evening, when Mr. Bowden always stood at the parlor door discoursing, until my mother out of courtesy said—"Will you not step in, Mr. Bowden?" when Mr. Bowden *did* step in, and did not step out again till supper-time, when he looked at my mother long and earnestly, and paid the strictest attention to all her suggestions, I began to have my suspicions, and to glow with secret indignation.

And how did my mother behave at this critical juncture? Why, she did what the sternest specimen of the fair sex would have done in a similar position. She thought it over before she declared war with the enemy, or ran up the white flag of truce.

She was only forty years of age, was certainly a pretty woman, and if there had not been the fly-leaf of the family Bible to stare her in the face, she could have told the world she was thirty-five, and no one would have doubted the assertion. She was a pretty woman, I have said—for an amiable temper

and the Nettleton breezes had kept her plump and rosy, and she was a good figure, too, thanks to Nature and staylaces. She was a devout woman, also—never thought of going to bed without prayers half an hour long, or having breakfast without a grace which was almost without an end at all. She was interested in Mr. Bowden's sermons, she had been a widow more than six years, and "Mrs. Bowden" would not sound so badly after all!

I do not affirm the above were exactly my mother's thoughts, but I think something like them flitted through her brain when Mr. Bowden began to cast sheep's eyes at her. Certainly a change came o'er the spirit of my mother's dream, though she was hardly aware of it herself. She had been always neat in her apparel, but she became still more particular—even snapped up the poor dressmaker for making her new merino a trifle too baggy in the waist—was careful about her hair and the set of her widow's cap, grew more thoughtful, took to blushing, and left off the silver spectacles. As for Mr.

Bowden's praises, she sang them to me every day, was full of anecdotes of his good deeds, overflowing with remarks on his fine sermons, and as day after day cleared the mist before my eyes, and set me speculating on the future, so my admiration for the Methodist preacher grew less in proportion.

What business had he to think of my mother?—that mother who cried so bitterly and said she should never know a happy minute again when the doctor told her "There was no hope in this world for her husband!"—what business was it of his to be interested in all she did and said, to meet her and me every time we went to chapel, to walk by my mother's side, to offer her his arm?

Like a foolish boy as I was, I thought I could thwart these attentions by becoming sullen and morose, capricious in my temper, irregular in my movements, rude to Mr. Bowden. My perplexed mother—for she had not made up her mind yet—was pained at my eccentricities, couldn't account for them, sought advice and consolation in the eternal Methodist

minister, wondered why I was so strange and unfilial, cried in the solitude of her own chamber at my general behavior.

This unsatisfactory state of things continued till the beginning of November, eighteen hundred and forty-one. The day is well remembered.

It was the fifth of November. Mr. Myers, the schoolmaster, had been wheedled out of a holiday; he was a good-tempered merry old fellow, and about as well qualified for a schoolmaster as myself. The whole day was before me and my comrades, and what a lively day we had determined to make of it! What a Guy Fawkes we had constructed for future annihilation on the Common—a subscription Guy Fawkes, six feet high at least, with a man's hat on his head, and a pipe in his mouth! My bosom friend and confidant, Tom Arrow—one year my senior, biggest boy at Myers' school, son of Arrow, the chemist, opposite the Bell Inn, a boy who was always getting into scrapes himself and leading me into more than I should have got into alone—found the coat and the boots, four youths of my ac-

quaintance contributed the stuffing, the hat and the waistcoat, and I had taken the liberty of borrowing Mr. Bowden's trousers—the old pair with the fine-drawing on the knee.

It was a vile habit of my mother's to be nervous on the fifth of November; she had a womanly horror of bonfires and fireworks, and was always fearful on that day of my being blown up or burnt to ashes. Therefore it was not till tea-time, when it was quite dark and Tom Arrow was significantly whistling outside, that I broke the ice concerning my intentions.

"I'm just going out for half-an-hour or so, mother."

"To-night!" said my mother in reply; "why, it's pitch dark, Robert, and you have got a little cold, you know. I really would not go out to-night, my dear—I would stay at home and take a Grook."

I had expected a certain amount of opposition, and was prepared with my defence.

"I shall be home at eight o'clock precisely. Tom Arrow promised his father he would be home *before* eight, mother."

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"Oh! that Tom Arrow. He is always leading you into mischief."

"I'm not going into mischief, mother."

"Where are you going?"

"On the Common for—for a walk."

"Oh dear!—and it's Guy Fawkes night, and all the riff-raff of the town will be letting off those nasty fireworks;—now don't go too near the fireworks, there's a good boy."

"Not for the world, mother!"

"And don't be later than eight, or I shall be so uneasy about you, Robert. And there are your lessons to learn, remember: Mr. Bowden says he is sure you do not half learn your lessons."

"It's no business of Mr. Bowden's—he's always poking his—"

"Robert, my dear!" cried my mother, sharply.

"And so he is!" said I, surlily pushing away my chair and snatching up my cap; "and I can never say a word without it's Mr. Bowden this, and Mr. Bowden that—I don't care for him, and you can tell him so!"

"You are a very wicked boy, Robert," said

my mother, with a heightened color; "and I hope you will not come to a bad end, that's all."

"Bad end!" exclaimed I; "why, it's enough to make me fling myself head foremost into the first bonfire I can find to-night."

"Good gracious, boy!" cried my mother, turning pale, "don't talk so awfully, don't. What is enough to make you, Robert?"

Having almost forgotten the primary subject of dispute in my excitement, I answered:

"Never mind."

"There, go and play, and pray don't go too near the fireworks—Oh! what's that?"

Bang!

Master Arrow, tired of waiting outside and doing nothing, was letting off the squibs to wile away the time, and fearful of his precipitation, I put an end to the dialogue with my mother, by rushing into the street.

I found not only Tom Arrow outside, but a round dozen of my schoolfellows, sitting on the door-steps, with the Guy in their arms. After my appearance had been hailed with a shout

that must have frightened my mother, and even Mr. Bowden, who was upstairs in his own room thinking over his Sunday's sermons, we hurried off in a body to the Common, bearing Fawkes on our shoulders.

Nettleton Common wore a brisk and lively aspect that evening; the townsfolk, who were fond of combustibles, having assembled in great force.

Our pocket-money having been limited, our powder and fireworks had soon become memories of the past, and we were left with nothing to do but watch the burning Guy and the squibs and crackers of our contemporaries. Whilst thus employed, Tom Arrow, who had taken a survey of the country, gave a loud

"Hollo!"

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"Oh! hasn't Squire Heberdeen got a prime set out over there, Bob. By George, there goes a fire balloon!—come on!"

Tom was off like a shot across the Common, and the rest of us were quickly after him, tearing over the damp grass, leaping ditches, and breaking through hedges and furze-

bushes in the direction of Squire Heberdeen's house, a large, old-fashioned red-brick mansion, hemmed round by sturdy elms that had weathered the storms of a hundred years. Upon our nearer approach we discovered that the fireworks were being let off in the orchard at the rear of the house, and as the orchard was surrounded by a high brick wall, ornamented on the top with broken glass, we paused in a meadow into which we had unceremoniously intruded, and held a hasty council of war.

"What's to be done, Tom?"

"I don't much care about getting on that wall," said Tom.

"Oh! there are not many broken bottles," remarked a youth of nine, who was evidently of an ambitious turn of mind. "Hark! they are talking about serpents! Let's chance it!"

"And I see two fellows already on the wall under the pear-tree," I cried; "here goes —follow my leader!"

And with a dash at the wall, and totally regardless of consequences, I gave a spring and clambered to the summit, where I

found the glass rather sharp—what there was of it. The rest of us had soon taken up our posts of observation, and the noise in the orchard being great, the attention of its occupants entirely absorbed, and the shadows of the trees near the wall affording a fair screen, our arrival passed unnoticed.

There was a select company of about thirty in the orchard—men, women, and children. There was a bonfire too, and as the dark figures of the company passed before its blaze, I could distinguish one or two persons well known in the village of Nettleton. There was the Squire himself, as tall as a Life Guardsman, and as full of pranks as a monkey, running about the orchard with lighted squibs in his hands and frightening the ladies, whose little screams and merry laughs made the place ring again. How he did laugh himself too, and what a fat hearty laugh he had! There was the curate of Nettleton church, buttoned up to the throat, and simpering at everything, and keeping as well as he could behind the skirts of the ladies—of course he was quite a ladies' man, curates always are—

and taking to his heels with the fair sex whenever the Squire or any gentleman of his acquaintance dashed in his direction. There was young Heberdeen too—"young Impudence," as the townsfolk called him, under the rose—imitating his father, and squibbing everybody, his sire included; and there were rich neighbors of the Squire, and their sons and daughters, and Miss Heberdeen, a tall and pretty girl, and Mrs. Heberdeen, a slight and graceful lady of some six-and-thirty years of age. It was quite a jubilee in the orchard below—there were half-a-dozen huge firework devices yet to be ignited, and Tom Arrow and I congratulated ourselves on having arrived in time for them—there was another fire-balloon getting ready, and the incessant firing of squibs and crackers was being kept up in twenty different places.

"Isn't this stunning?" whispered Arrow, exultingly.

"I hope they wont see us," I replied; "where are the other chaps?"

"Oh! they are somewhere hereabouts—I say."

"What's the matter?"

"Don't I wish I was young Heberdeen, to have such a lot of fireworks, and—oh! don't these bottles hurt!"

"Do hold your tongue, Tom," I entreated, "or I'm blest if they won't hear us."

"It's all very fine to say hold your tongue," grumbled Tom, "but I have got on a sharp place. Just get up a little higher, will you?"

"I can't, here's a fellow next me won't move an inch."

Tom looked round me at "the fellow" alluded to—a gawky, ragged gipsy-boy, with bare feet and no jacket or cap on—and asked him to be kind enough to move up higher. The gipsy-boy, who had been at some pains to dislodge the broken glass from the mortar in his vicinity, very naturally declined to shift his quarters, and as he was a very big boy, and accompanied by a friend much bigger, we did not care to be too urgent. Still there are bounds even to the temper of a saint, and my amiability began to get ruffled as the gipsy-boy persisted in putting a shock head of hair before my eyes, and intercepting my view

whenever there was anything worth seeing going on. No remonstrances of mine could induce the individual to consider his behavior selfish, and as he replied to my objections with an uncouth gibberish, which neither I nor Arrow comprehended, there was no arranging the difficulty with him.

Meanwhile the squibbing, the shouting, the laughing went on below in the orchard, everybody was in the best of spirits there. The Squire, the ladies, the gentlemen, young Heberdeen and his boy friends, darted hither and thither, and the constant passing and repassing the broad bright flame of the bonfire made me dizzy at my post. Suddenly there was a shout of laughter, a rush of a half dozen gentlemen with lighted squibs, and a vigorous attack made on those less fortunate companions of mine who had posted themselves in a more conspicuous place. More roars of laughter, the Squire stamping about the orchard and holding his sides, a hasty scrambling down the wall, my comrades scouring across the meadow and making for the high road.

"It's all right. They have gone back—they don't see us," said Tom.

The gipsy-boy on the other side of me leaned forward and chattered something, making a gesture of silence at the same time. Tom Arrow, paying no attention, continued to congratulate himself and me in a loud voice, till the gipsy-boy, leaning more forward still, flung suddenly a long arm and hand out, and caught Tom a "back-hander" on the nose.

"Come, I say," cried Tom, whose blood began to boil as well as run, "I'm not going to stand that, I can tell you, you gipsy blackguard!"

Tom, holding my shoulder for support, threw himself round me and aimed a savage blow at his insulter, who, with an alertness that showed considerable practice, jerked up his right arm and nearly broke Tom's wrist. But this manœuvring of the party on each side of me proved too much for my equilibrium, and I fell forward, bearing Arrow, whose position was precarious, in the same direction.

"Hold tight, you, Bob!" shrieked Arrow.

"I can't!" I yelled, making a despairing

clutch at the gipsy-boy, who kicked and fought madly in his efforts to elude my grasp. It was too late, there was a slight scuffle, a cry, and then Tom, I, and the two gipsies came down all of a heap into the orchard.

"Tally-ho!" cried the Squire; "here are some more young vagabonds on the premises. Roast them out, there. Make ready, present, fire!"

Whiz—bang came the squibs amongst us, the gipsy-boys were on their feet and over the wall again with cat-like celerity. Tom and I gave a despairing leap in the same direction, brought our heads together with a crash, and once more reposed full length on Squire Heberdeen's grass.

The shadowy trees, the bonfire, and the guests of Mr. Heberdeen spun round before my eyes, and it was some moments before I could collect my senses in any decent order. When the squibbing had ceased and I had become conscious of my position, I found Tom sitting by my side and rubbing his head, a dog barking and jumping about, and quite a ring of faces round us.

"I am afraid they are hurt, papa," I heard Miss Heberdeen remark.

"Confound the rascals," cried the Squire, "to come scaling the walls like young house-breakers. Get up, there—be off, boys—be off! I hope," he said, his voice suddenly softening, "that you have not hurt yourselves, you scamps!"

"No, no, sir," said Tom, rising; "you see it was all an accident, sir—of course we never meant to come here. You see, Squire, we were walking quietly along the high road when—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Squire, impatiently; "very quietly, I have no doubt. Who are you?"

"Master Arrow, if you please, sir."

"What, the chemist's son?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thought I knew your face somewhere; and now, sir," turning to me, "whose son are you?"

But my attention had become absorbed by the dog, which, encouraged by young Heberdeen, was barking and jumping nearer and

nearer, and showing all its teeth in a very unpleasant manner. It was a wiry-haired, bristling, prick-eared terrier, whose countenance expressed the most intense ferocity.

"Call that dog off, Squire Heberdeen," I cried; "tell your son to hold him off, or he'll bite one of us."

The Squire laughed at my alarm.

I felt my irritable tempers rising; the ring of faces, on many of which was expressed a kind of contemptuous curiosity, the pain I felt from my fall, the ridiculous figure I was conscious of presenting, the snapping of the dog so close to my heels, and the evident enjoyment which the Squire and his son were taking in my fears, all tended to arouse me.

Looking daggers at young Heberdeen, I said:—

"You are fast enough now with your dog, young squire. Had I met you in the lanes alone, you would have run away for fear of another black eye."

"I'm not afraid of you," retorted young Heberdeen; "I never was, you know. You

can't say I ever ran away from you in all my life. Bite him, Ponto."

I stooped and picked up a formidable three-cornered stone.

"He'd better," said I, significantly.

"Ponto, down!" shouted the Squire, who was becoming tired of this interruption to his festivities.

The dog crouched on the grass at the feet of his young master.

"Stones, eh?" said the Squire. "You are a nice lad to trespass upon a gentleman's grounds, and then think of splitting some one's head open. What's your name?"

I did not answer. He came nearer to me, took the stone out of my hand, and looked me in the face.

"Young Woodleigh, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom Arrow, very officiously.

"Pity your mother does not bring you up better, or keep you in doors more often. I have heard of you before, my lad."

"You have heard nothing wrong of me, Squire Heberdeen."

"You are the boy who has twice insulted and struck my son."

"I struck him in self-defence; I struck him for interfering with me, didn't I, Tom? Grand as he is, I'm not afraid of him."

"There, be off, be off. You are a black sheep, and will never come to any good!"

"Which way are we to go, sir?" inquired Tom Arrow, with a polite bow.

"Through the side gate to the left, and don't let me catch either of you here again, or I shall certainly horsewhip you."

"It was entirely an accident, sir, I assure you," murmured Tom, as we walked slowly in the direction of the gate which opened into the meadow, and at which one of Squire Heberdeen's grooms was waiting. Tom slunk along, crestfallen enough; he did not once look up at the faces of Squire Heberdeen's guests, who seemed anxious to catch a glimpse of the impudent intruders; I, less abashed, or more defiant, lowered at them from under my bent brows. I heard them murmuring—

"An evil-looking lad—a bold young rascal

—a bad boy!" till the orchard gate was slammed behind us.

"You coward!" I said to Arrow when we were in the meadow.

"What am I a coward for?" Tom asked.

"For saying nothing—for letting them call you anything they pleased."

"I didn't want to get into any more scrapes. Squire Heberdeen's one of my father's best customers, and Mrs. Heberdeen is always coming into the shop with cough prescriptions to be made up. It would not have done, Bob, and oh—"

I was a few paces in advance. I stopped and looked back at him.

"What's the matter now?"

"Oh! haven't you torn, Bob!—oh! haven't you," he cried, with a shriek of laughter—"just torn your corduroys!"

It was too true. It is the last feather breaks the camel's back—it was the last moment on the broken glass that had brought me into disgrace and ruined a fine pair of trousers. Tom Arrow and I walked disconsolately into Nettleton—I keeping in the sha-

dow of the old-fashioned houses, and shunning the lights from the few shop-windows which remained open ; Tom full of fear of what his father would say, I full of bad temper.

Miserable fifth of November. Miserable Robert Woodleigh, whose troubles that night were not ended !

CHAPTER IV.

A WIDOW BEWITCHED.

It was striking ten when I knocked at my mother's door. Sarah, the small maid, hardly knew me as she let me into the passage, I was such a disreputable object.

"Lor! is that really you, Master Robert?"

"Never *you* mind who it is. Where's mother?"

"In the parlor along with Mr. Bowden."

"Along with Mr. Bowden, eh? It seems as if—why don't you go downstairs?"

The servant-maid hastily departed, and I stood on the mat before the front parlor door, and debated whether I should enter or

not. I was two hours behind time; my appearance was certainly not respectable; I had torn my clothes in an unseemly manner; my face was black, and my hands were scratched with the glass from Squire Heberdeen's wall. There would be questions put me as to where I had been and what I had been doing, and Mr. Bowden would sit and frown at me, and, backed by the approving nods of my mother, perhaps treat me to a sermon all to myself. Still I was curious; there was a jealous feeling at my heart. Mr. Bowden was generally in bed by ten o'clock at night, was always in his own room at least —what did he want keeping my mother company at so late an hour?

Yes, I would go in.

Without taking the trouble to announce my arrival by a preliminary tap on the panel of the door, I turned the handle, and rather unceremoniously walked into the parlor.

Mr. Bowden was sitting by the side of my mother, my mother was looking shyly at the fire. He had been holding her hand in his, I saw it hurriedly drawn away as I advanced

into the room. Mr. Bowden gave a hard dry cough, and scratched his head—he was conscious that a man of fifty doing the amiable was not exactly a sensible or improving spectacle—and my mother for a moment was too abashed to look at me.

She turned her blushing face towards me at last, and said :—

"So you have come home, Robert?"

"Yes," I answered moodily.

"You are very late, dear—it's past nine o'clock."

"It's past ten!"

Mr. Bowden came to the rescue.

"You have had a long holiday, Master Robert. I suppose you are tired?"

I regarded Mr. Bowden with no reverent looks. It did not matter to me that he was a Methodist minister, head of my mother's chapel, respected in the town. He was trying to rob me of my mother's love—to make my mother forget that father who had been so fond of me! He was a man I had never liked, he was old, and poor, and ugly, and yet he had found a way to touch my mother's heart.

I was a boy of little thought or feeling, of less command of temper, impetuous and saucy. My answer was quite worthy of me.

"I don't care whether I am tired or not—no more do you."

Mr. Bowden began to blush then and look angry, till my mother whispered something in his ear. He coughed, and rubbed his whity-brown hair vigorously.

"Will you come and sit down, Robert?" asked my mother.

"No."

"Mr. Bowden wishes to speak with you, my dear. Do come and sit down a moment?"

"You don't want me—you had rather be alone together. I—I—I am going upstairs!"

Half choking, I tore out of the parlor, and dashed up to my own little room, where I flung myself at the bed's foot, and, burying my face in the patch-work counterpane, cried passionately and bitterly.

The moon had risen and was shining in my chamber; all was so calm and still, so much in contrast to my own turbulent feelings. Five minutes could not have passed thus before I

felt two warm arms round my neck and a mother's face against my own.

"Robert dear, Robert dear, won't you speak to me!"

I sobbed and struggled, but the arms retained their hold.

"You must hear what I have to say, Robert —you loved your mother once, boy."

"She loved *me* once, but now—"

"But now she loves you more than ever—loves her child before anyone or anything in this world."

"It is not true!"

"It *is*," my mother said. "Now, will you listen to me?"

"Yes."

The arms pressed more fondly round my neck as she knelt by my side and told her story to me.

"Mr. Bowden has asked me, Robert dear, to marry him. He is the best of men, the kindest-hearted in his way—I—I think I should be happy if I were his wife—I think he would make you a good father, and love you as his son."

"No, no."

"Yes, yes. You do not know him, Robert — you have cruelly misunderstood him."

"Go on."

"I have thought of this some time—have spent many sleepless nights in dwelling on it. Passing over my own feelings, my own wishes, Robert, I believe it will be acting for the best to marry him, for it gives another protector to my child."

"But—"

"But, Robert," said she, interrupting me, "if you feel that you will be unhappy, that there is misery before you, that you can never love him, or that you will love your mother less, why, say so truly, dear, and ask me not to have him. The mother thinks of her fatherless boy's happiness before her own or any one's."

She strained me to her breast, and her tears fell on me. I was softened, all the evil in my nature melted away that night, and I was my true mother's child. I flung my arms round her, crying:—

"Not for my sake, mother, not for mine! I am a wicked, selfish boy, and the last one to be studied in the world. Don't mind me, care for me. I am sure you will be happy, and I shall be happy too, in time, perhaps! He will make me a good father—not like that one—that one—"

I broke down again, and my mother cried with me for company's sake.

After a while my mother murmured,

"Will you come downstairs and speak to Mr. Bowden, Robert?"

"It will not please him to see me."

"It will please your mother."

"Very well then," said I, with a sigh.

Mother and son got up from their knees at the bedside, and went downstairs to Mr. Bowden. We found him sitting before the fire, his hands upon his knees, his chin between his hands in a reflective attitude. Had he repented his precipitation and wished he had not done it! Marriage is a venturesome game, and there are a good many blanks in the lucky-bag which Dame Fortune shakes in our faces.

"Jacob," said my mother, "here's Robert."

Jacob! Good heavens, had it come to Jacob already?

Jacob Bowden looked up, turned round, and extended his hard hand — had he been a blacksmith by profession, it could not have been harder.

When my hand was in his, he held it firmly, saying:—

"Has your mother told you all, Robert?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sorry, I think?"

"Not now, Mr. Bowden."

"I hope you will not have cause to feel sorry again. I hope we shall be better friends, boy."

I hung my head. There was a kindness, even a gentleness, in his manner of addressing me, that was strangely different to his usual way.

He continued.

"I think we shall agree together, Robert, if I exercise a little patience, and you a little more restraint—if you will believe all I do and say is for your welfare, and look upon me

as a second father, who has a right to warn and hinder you from evil."

He was talking of warning and hindering already! I could see the future before me, I knew how the story would end; but what could I say that night, with him so earnest, and my mother by his side so anxious?

"As your father, I shall have a right to exercise a watch upon your actions, I should be failing in my duty were I to neglect it. If you will have confidence in me, we shall get on very well together, Robert."

"I hope we shall, sir."

"You must not misjudge me, or misconstrue my motives," said he, as he released my hand with a friendly pressure; "that will be doing me a cruel wrong. I have been an unhappy man for many, many years, through those nearest and dearest to me putting a false construction on my actions. It is so easy to do that, and yet it is so easy to avoid it!"

"Robert will be the best of boys," observed my sanguine mother.

"Perhaps my unhappiness, with a blessing

from above, will cease with my new life," said he; "I shall have a faithful and devout wife, and that is the greatest comfort man can have on earth. Robert," turning to me, "you do not know I have a daughter."

I looked up very much surprised.

"It is a painful subject, and I have spoken little of it, save lately to your mother. My daughter has misunderstood me all my life; and, God forgive her, has little love or respect for her poor father. Pride and self-confidence have induced her to seek her own way in life; I pray they may not fail her in her hour of need, as they have failed so many."

His voice was growing husky, and he had to cough two or three times, and turn away his head a moment before he could conclude.

"I speak of her, Robert, at this time, because there are some traits in your character akin to hers, and you remind me of her. But you are a boy yet, you love your mother and honor your father's memory; there may be a bright future waiting for you, who knows?"

Who knows indeed! who has foreknowledge of what is waiting behind the impenetrable

screen that separates the present from the life beyond—what fears, hopes, joys, sorrows, are crowding together in the background, and biding their turn to make or break him? I do not think that a very wise aphorism which says, "The child is father to the man." Man is a mystery, and too often ends his pilgrimage with little stamp of his past childhood on him.

I thought Mr. Bowden might be in the right, that there might be also a fair future waiting for little Bob Woodleigh, with the torn corduroys. So did my mother—so had always my mother for the matter of that. *She*, honest old heart, saw all the virtues I had with a magnifying glass, and heaps of virtues I had not too, and drew one of those fancy pictures in fugitive colors, which mothers and fathers will indulge in till there are no more children to sketch in the foreground of life.

Mr. Bowden and I shook hands again before I retraced my steps to the bedroom. Then my mother came stealing upstairs to kiss me once more; to ask, somewhat anxiously, how I liked Mr. Bowden, now!

"Better, mother, better."

"God bless you, boy; I knew you would. How pale you are looking, and, dear me, how you have torn your — ahem! — clothes."

She thrust something hard into my hand.

"These will comfort you, to-night. Don't spare them, Robert, take as many as you like."

I opened my hand and gazed ruefully at the long wooden box within it.

"GROOK'S PILLS!"

CHAPTER V.

THE HAPPY PAIR.

It was soon over Nettleton town that Mr. Bowden and the pretty widow Woodleigh were engaged to be married. Neither Mr. Bowden nor my mother had dropt a single word concerning the engagement, and yet the world of Nettleton, that is everyone of the feminine gender, knew all about it, and had a great deal to say for and against the match —it being a grand subject, and nobody's business.

Every female in Nettleton could have told you—even Mrs. Jinks, the pew-opener of Nettleton chapel, who had bad eyes, and wore

a green shade to her antediluvian bonnet—that she had seen this, oh! ever so long ago; that Mrs. Woodleigh had been setting her cap for months and months at the preacher, who was a poor innocent fellow to fall so unsuspiciously into the net which Delilah had spread for him. Yes, it was a fact; there he was, dear lamb, going to be married!—"to be married to a woman," said Miss Perks, a Methodist lady of uncertain age and a certain income of thirty-eight pounds a-year in ground rents, "without a feather to fly with!"

Well, they were a queer couple, certainly; they were not going to be married for money, so I suppose it was a love-match, and that made people spiteful.

My mother had always a great reverence for preachers—Methodist preachers in particular. She believed they possessed every virtue under heaven, and practised infinitely more than they preached, and were the best of company in the pulpit or out of it. Since her residence in Nettleton, she had been one of the most earnest of the Methodist flock, and had quarrelled more

than once with her neighbors for not seeing the brightest of halos round Mr. Parnell's fat little head; and when Mr. Bowden's turn came to reign, her allegiance had been just as faithful—more faithful, satirical people observed, for the reason that Mr. Bowden was a widower and easily imposed upon. Therefore, when that gentleman, a real Methodist minister, was smitten with the fair face and buxom form of my mother, my mother was naturally flattered, and when he told her the story of how unfortunate he had been all his life, my mother pitied him,—and pity is akin to love, everybody knows! There was some little pride, too, in being the minister's wife, at the bottom of it, and more thought, as she had already confessed, for her son, who would have a devout man for a protector and counsellor.

And there was little selfishness, if any, in Mr. Bowden's motives. He was about to marry a widow lady of forty years of age, who had an ill-tempered, headstrong boy of thirteen for a son—a widow who had but little money in the world to add to his own

scanty income; who was, between you and me, reader, even one quarter back in her rent! But then, my mother looked the picture of good temper—and she did not belie her looks—was a truly pious, gentle, charitable woman, a careful woman, too, who had never spent a waste penny in her life, unless it was on her son now and then, when he had been more than usually coaxing. She must have presented a striking contrast to Mrs. Bowden the first, who I have every reason to believe was a Tartar.

So Mr. Bowden was married to Mrs. Woodleigh. He had grown tired of single blessedness and sewing on his own shirt-buttons; therefore, he took to himself the best-looking widow in Nettleton, and was married by Mr. Parnell—who came expressly from London to conduct the ceremony—in the little Methodist chapel on the hill. Mr. Parnell left for London immediately after the nuptial knot was tied, and my mother, my new father and I, returned in stately procession to the town.

Mr. Bowden's self-possession under trying circumstances was something remarkable, for

he walked through the High Street with his step as firm and his countenance as grim as ever, despite the sly looks of his neighbors, every one of whom knew where he had been, and on what errand. My mother kept her eyes fixed on the little round stones which formed the footway, and counted them all the way home, whilst I felt as red and confused at the peeping from doors and over window-blinds, as though I had been married myself.

There was a wedding-breakfast awaiting us, and several delicacies of the season to be discussed, including some oranges and a cocoa-nut, provided by a thoughtful mother who knew my tastes to a nicety. But, somehow, the oranges were sour, and the cocoa-nut was of a peculiar flavor, and I think a Barmecide feast that day would have agreed with me better.

It was a dreary festival; my mother and I were thoughtful, and Mr. Bowden did not say much to cheer us up, did not even sing us a hymn in long metre.

And in that little room, from which this history first dates, it is as well to close the

scene—a new era of life beginning for the wilful son, as well as for the blushing mother.

So far on my progress, I begin again with lighter heart and hand less faint. It is the dwelling on the quiet days which unnerves me most—days which, to look back upon, bring the tears to my eyes. It is a sunny green spot, that life in Nettleton before my mother's marriage—despite those little troubles that came to me when I saw through the game of courtship and matrimony which my mother and the preacher were playing. The Oasis is past, and there is some desert land coming.

Well, there is desert land on the road of most fellow-travellers. He is a happy man who has basked in sunshine all his life and had nothing to cross him. Crosses are for the children of men; I have had my share of them, and have at least borne them without crying my eyes out and raving at fortune. Better men than I have had worse ones, —calmer men, men with cooler heads, would have resisted such troubles as mine, and come off with less wounds in the melée. But

then I was headstrong and had a will of my own. On the fifth of November, Squire Heberdeen told me I was a black sheep and predicted that I should never come to any good, and Squire Heberdeen was not far out in his prophecy.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK II.

"What, Master Lessingham!
You that were wont to be compos'd of mirth,
All spirit and fire, alacrity itself,
Like the lustre of a late bright-shining sun,
Now wrapt in clouds and darkness!"

WEBSTER.

"O, if your father knew this, what a lecture
Of bitter castigation he would read you!"

GEORGE CHAPMAN.

CHAPTER I.

PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

When Mr. Parnell joined together the hands of Jacob Bowden, widower, and Sarah Woodleigh, widow, I felt assured—even in the little chapel where the happy pair of Methodists were plighting troth—that a dismal time of it was coming. Mr. Bowden had said—"As your father, I shall have a right to exercise a watch over your actions," and I was pretty certain that that watch would be a strict one. Confident on that point, I did not join very heartily in the wedding festivities, despite the gracious manner of my step-father. I knew the gracious manner would depart, the old

sternness speedily return, and Jacob Bowden be himself again before many weeks went over his head.

Right enough too, Robert Woodleigh; for before the spring blossoms came, or Nettleton Woods were green, Mr. Bowden was indeed a father to me! He took the greatest care of me, he would not hear of my being out after dark, of putting away my school-books in the green-baize bag until I had recited the morrow's lessons to him, of idling in the lanes, of talking with Tom Arrow at his father's shop-door when I was sent on errands, of playing at "Buttons," which he considered gambling, of singing comic songs from the Penny Warbler—a work I had subscribed to for upwards of sixteen months, and which he styled a profane and vulgar publication.

This was the beginning—the first fruits off a very hard and ugly tree of the crab-apple species—there was more to follow as the world went round.

Still I bore it all; I had made up my mind to do that before my mother's marriage, for that mother's sake. She was happy; Mr.

Bowden had become the idol of her worship, and Mr. Bowden was very fond of her. He had found a woman who could see no faults in him, who obeyed his slightest wish, and who would have thought it a terrible sin to contradict a Methodist minister—and such a minister!

What I think of Mr. Bowden now, is very different from my past opinion of him. The boy never did him justice, the man at least attempts it. I know he meant me well, but I do not believe, even at this present moment when I can look back at all that is past calmly and philosophically, that he went the best way to educe the good from me. It is not every tree that can be forced the same way—one will bend to the will of the trainer, but another will break.

Mr. Bowden made his first grand move on the board in the beginning of March.

"Let me see," he remarked one evening as we sat at tea, "let me see, Robert; you are going on for fifteen, are you not?"

"Yes," said my mother, answering my question, and regarding me with that motherly

look which never vanished from her eyes, "fifteen—what a big boy he is growing, to be sure! His things are always too short for him."

"I am running up, rather," I observed; "I wish I did not grow so fast, for these corduroys of mine will soon be knee-breeches, mother."

My mother smiled; Mr. Bowden, who had an objection to levity, and who was about to introduce a grave subject, did not alter his expression of countenance.

"Fifteen next November," said Mr. Bowden, "and so ignorant for his age too! It is very sad."

I looked up at this. Ignorant, indeed! Why, I had been in four syllables ever so long, and as for my knowledge of arithmetic, geography, and those sorts of things, it was quite wonderful in my opinion. Even my mother could not believe his assertion.

"Ignorant, Jacob!" she exclaimed, with that faint air of surprise which was habitual to her; "did you say ignorant, dear?"

"Yes, Sarah, I did say ignorant. And I

think too," breaking upon new ground with a loud cough, "that Robert will always remain ignorant while he keeps at that trumpery and ridiculous school. The lessons are trivial, the schoolmaster has no firmness, no style in fact; the time is wasted by master and pupils, and it's my firm opinion that they are all idle together."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated my mother, "and to think I have been paying a shilling a-week for the last five years!"

I sat and ate my thick slice of bread-and-butter, gravely surveying my step-father, and inwardly murmuring, "*Go it!*" There was nothing to say in defence at present. I had hardly got used to Mr. Bowden or his ways, and I was not aware of his reasons for expatiating on my wretched state of ignorance.

"The money has been absolutely thrown away, and Robert has lost valuable opportunities of improvement, both in school and out of it. It is time to make a change, Sarah."

Sarah perfectly coincided, of course.

"Therefore, for the future I shall teach Robert myself."

I felt my heart sink to a fathomless depth within me. Five hundred Grook's pills could not have affected me with so awful a sensation.

"I have time on my hands," he continued, "I have confidence in my theory of education, and I see no excuse for throwing a shilling every week into the street."

"But—" I began.

"But, Robert," he interrupted, "you must grant me a fair trial. You have had five years in Mr. Myers' school, and have not profited therein; now put yourself in my hands."

It was no use saying I would rather put myself in the hands of anybody on earth than his; when Mr. Bowden had once made up his mind, nothing short of a thunderbolt could change it. He was a very firm man; Virginius, Marcus Curtius, Junius Brutus, and other respectable Romans must have been something like him, and if he had been born in their day. how they would have admired him, and cried, "Hail, brother, well met!" Oh! if he had

only been born in their day, how comfortable it would have been!

It was all arranged and settled that evening. From next Monday-week I was to give up that dear old boys' school of mine, where the tasks were so easy, and the punishment so mild — where the boys were so merry, and such "Jolly companions every one"—where I, Bob Woodleigh, was thought so much of, and where Tom Arrow played Pythias to my Damon! Give up the fun in that half-mile walk home, give up all that little world which goes so far to make the heart of youth light, and take to hard study under Jacob Bowden, in the back parlor at home.

Monday week came round. Mr. Myers, who was a poor man, with fifteen in family, reluctantly accepted my resignation. Mr. Bowden procured me a few new books, and made shift with the rest of the old ones. I took my place on one side of the table in the back parlor, and Mr. Bowden sat opposite me, graver than a judge.

I certainly made some progress under his tuition, for there was little to distract my

thoughts from Murray, Goldsmith, Pinnock, and Dilworth. There was no Mr. Myers to drop off to sleep with his head on the desk and his long hair in the inkstand—no chance of "making faces" at him when his eyes were closed to the daylight; no Tom Arrow at my side to play odd and even with under the cover of my copy-book; no sly nudges with the elbow, quiet practical jokes with the next form, or sudden bursts of laughter, muffled by mouthfuls of pinafore and pocket-handkerchief. It was so dull, cold, and business-like —even the sun did not shine on the back of the house till three in the afternoon—it was so depressing to the spirits!

I believe I should have gone into a melancholy-mad sort of way, had it not been for the want of regularity in the prosecution of my studies. Mr. Bowden, fortunately for me, had many duties to perform; he was partial to preaching at all times and seasons; ministers of other little chapels of the Methodist persuasion occasionally solicited his assistance; he had sometimes a call to an open-air discourse in a distant village; he had a round of

poor bed-ridden people to console twice a-week, and he went on *that* beat every Monday and Thursday morning with the punctuality of a policeman. Of course, Mr. Bowden set me long tasks during his absence, and of course I knew little concerning them when he returned from his professional labors. He was a hard-hearted man, for he limited me to one half-holiday a-week—Saturday afternoon—and that he expected me to spend in reading some wretched tracts without an anecdote or a picture in them. Sometimes I had a friend to keep me company on those half-holidays—sometimes I went on Nettleton Common with my cricket-bat, and played with Tom Arrow and my old companions. But Mr. Bowden, with all his teaching, made me neither pious nor docile; the iron curb was drawn too tight, and I was chafing at the restraint imposed upon my liberty. For fourteen years of my life I had had my own way; in the fifteenth, it was to be attempted, suddenly and unceremoniously, to deprive me of free action. It was a mistake, and like all mistakes, it led to trouble.

I became more cunning—more full of plausible excuses to get out of doors; more sullen in my nature. I began to think Methodism a bore, and Methodists a selfish, inconsiderate class, and the chapel on the hill a dreary place of penance. Mr. Bowden was always religious, always a minister; and as continual preaching never worked any good in this world yet, so it was to be expected that it did some harm to a stubborn nature like my own.

My mother strove to account for my brooding fits after her own fashion—she who was happier than she had ever been in her life. She thought I was improving in education, and getting of a serious turn of mind; was secretly glad I did not spend so much time with the idle young scamps of Nettleton, and was even building up a hope of seeing me a Methodist minister *some day*, and beating the dust out of a pulpit-cushion in the Bowden style. I did not think so, however; I thought more of the Miss Bowden, who never came to see her father, who had been also under his tuition for many years, and turned

out so bright a specimen of his moral training. I began in my heart to dislike Mr. Bowden, to look upon him as the bar between me and my freedom, the clog-weight on everything I wished to do. Still, I said nothing. I had promised my mother to do my best; and, though I had never learned the lesson of forbearance, I did it, nor uttered one complaint. The time came at last though.—It is not long before a storm when there is never a break in the sky !

One evening Mr. Bowden was absent on an important preaching mission, and was not expected home, to my extreme satisfaction, till ten o'clock at night. He had set me a vast quantity of Syntax, and a column of Principal Rivers and Mountains to learn, and had hinted that if there were any time to spare after the completion of my lessons, it might be profitably devoted to a small theme on "Religious Education, its advantages, and its effects on Society."

Mr. Bowden had departed at five o'clock in the afternoon, and I had completed Syntax and Principal Rivers at four and a-half minutes past five.

"*Done* your lessons!" exclaimed my mother, when I had informed her of my neat and prompt despatch of business.

"Yes—all of them," said I, confidently.

"And your theme?"

"Well, I haven't quite finished that, mother," I replied; "I thought I'd just polish off the last line or two in the evening. I'm going out, now, for a little while."

My mother had not the heart to offer opposition, so I put on my cap and ran out of doors to fetch Tom Arrow.

Tom Arrow was at home and ready to go anywhere, and as his father and mother seldom thwarted him in anything, he left home without a dissentient voice, and accompanied me to Nettleton Common, where we found a host of friends ready to receive us.

At half-past seven, when it was too dark for further sports and pastimes, my companions, with the exception of Arrow, went their separate ways.

"Are you going home, Bob?" asked Tom of me.

"My mother don't like me out after dark,

now," I answered. "So I suppose I must be off."

"Where's the parson to-night?"

"Gone preaching somewhere."

"What time do you expect him home?"

"Not till ten o'clock."

"Then I'll come home with you, Bob," said Arrow, "and we'll have out your old stage and play the 'Miller and his Men,' and make a jolly night of it."

I was perfectly agreeable, and Tom Arrow went home with me accordingly.

My mother looked surprised to see Master Arrow, but when he said "Good evening, Mrs. Bowden," and took off his cap in the politest manner, she smiled on him, returned his good evening, asked after his father, mother, and grandmother—more about Tom Arrow's grandmother presently—invited him into the parlor, and bidding us both be good boys and not make too much noise, as her head ached, left us to ourselves.

Now my old stage, which Tom Arrow was anxious to witness, had not seen light since my mother's marriage. It was a small skele-

ton piece of carpentry, with a pasteboard proscenium—twopence plain, and fourpence colored—and had a real green-baize curtain, which went up and down like life.

To this stage belonged a variety of scenes and characters, the collection of many juvenile years; a collection begun when my father—who was not a Methodist—was living, and allowed to increase by my easy mother, who waived all scruples concerning it for my sake. Many a time in the past had that stage been an amusement to Tom Arrow and my boy friends, until Mr. Bowden's arrival in Nettleton had been the signal for its consignment to the early grave of a lumber-cupboard.

Thinking that Mrs. Jacob Bowden might have some objections to urge in the present case, I stole upstairs in a burglarious manner, went into my room, opened the door of the great cupboard at the side of the bed, disinterred my dusty theatre and box of characters, and slipped silentiy downstairs with them.

The candle being lighted—we mourned the

loss of our little oil-lamps, that looked so nice and made such a nasty smell!—and the fire in the parlor being stirred, we prepared to make ourselves comfortable. There was no probability of my mother intruding upon us for the next two hours, and as Mr. Bowden was not expected home till ten o'clock at night, the "Miller and his Men" could be exhibited with impunity.

It was a performance under difficulties, for many of the characters were missing, some of the scenery did not act, Count Friburg would not stand up, Grindoff had only one leg, and Claudine's head was off. Still, it was like old times to have the stage on the back parlor table again, and Tom Arrow was an indulgent audience, and said "Bravo" to everything. I had lost the play-book, so it was an extempore performance, and those parts of the dialogue which I did not know, Tom did, and delivered for me in front, in a deep bass voice for Grindoff, and a shrill falsetto for Claudine. Taking it altogether, we got through the "Miller and his Men" in creditable style, and the blow-up of the mill in the last act was

performed twice at the special request of the whole "house."

Alas! during the second representation of the burning mill, with new and startling effects, produced by dropping pieces of lighted paper through the top of the stage, the well-known "*Rap, rap,* RAP" roused the echoes of the establishment.

Tom Arrow and I stared at each other aghast.

"Is that the parson!" cried Tom, leaping to his feet, and looking round for his cap.

"Yes—don't run away—lend a hand here—open that window!"

I caught up the stage, its scenes and characters in one heap, and Tom Arrow rushed to the window.

"It's fastened."

"Unfasten it then, there's a good fellow. Look alive!"

The street-door opened, and the heavy tread of my step-father was distinctly heard in the passage. Tom made a last frantic effort with the fastening, stumbled over a chair, fell against the window, and put each of his

elbows through a pane of glass, in the most clumsy manner.

"Oh! Tom," cried I, in a voice of despair; "you've done it!"

"By George, haven't I?" responded Tom, giving vent to a long and dismal whistle, like the wail of a Banshee.

The crash of glass had alarmed my mother and accelerated the pace of Mr. Bowden, for at the same time, both my parents hurriedly entered the parlor.

"Robert, my dear!" from my mother, and "Robert, sir, what is the meaning of this!" from my father.

"If you please, I've broken a window—two windows," said Tom, first recovering his voice; "I'm very sorry—it wasn't Bob's fault—and my father 'll pay for it, sir, or send a glazier in the morning."

Mr. Bowden glanced from the speaker to the two jagged holes in the glass, and scowled ferociously.

"I think you had better go home, Master Arrow."

"Yes, sir," responded Tom, looking round

for his cap a second time; "of course, I don't want to stop any longer, Mr. Bowden. I'm very sorry I broke the windows, and—I don't see my cap anywhere!"

Mr. Bowden's eyes turned to his step-son.

"What have you got there, Robert?"

"My stage," I answered moodily.

"Your WHAT?"

"Stage," I repeated.

"Good heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Bowden, in his most violent manner; "is it possible you have had such a toy of the devil's in the house, and I in ignorance! A stage!—a likeness of those evil places that corrupt all that is good and worthy, that represent and seek to palliate the grossest sins of which mankind is capable. Oh! Mrs. Bowden," turning to my mother, "you do not know anything of this, I hope?"

"I knew Robert had—had a little stage once," stammered my mother, as confused as any of us; "but I thought he had given up such folly."

"Such wickedness, Sarah," he shouted,

" such a snare of the evil one for his soul. Give it me, give it me, give it me ! "

He made a rush at the heap of heterogeneous matter in my arms, tore it from me, and dashed it on the fire. I made a spring towards it, but his strong hand caught me by the shoulder, and held me at arm's length.

" Stop, Robert—it is for your good. Keep still."

" For my good ! " I cried, exploding at last ; " everything seems for my good that makes me miserable. Let me come by ! You have no right to burn what my own father gave me ! "

My mother burst into tears.

" Oh ! Robert, Robert, don't be foolish ! "

I exerted all my boyish strength, and Mr. Bowden had some difficulty in holding me.

The stage had begun to blaze when Tom Arrow, whose round little black eyes had been observing everything, suddenly gave a wild cry, and darted round the table towards the fireplace. Mr. Bowden, suspecting a conspiracy, put out his disengaged arm, and stopped him.

"You young reptile!" he exclaimed, panting for breath.

Tom's politeness to his senior had entirely departed; he kicked and struggled vehemently.

"Let me go—don't call me a reptile," vociferated Tom; "just take your hands off, now! Though you are a parson, *you're not going to burn my cap*, and that's all about it!"

"Your cap!" cried my step-father, releasing his hold of Tom, who rushed to the fire, tore out his cap, which in my embarrassment at Mr. Bowden's unexpected return I had caught up with the stage and characters, and sent a shower of little blazing bits of wood over the rug and carpet.

My mother began wringing her hands.

"We shall have the house in flames! Oh! Lord, we shall all be on fire in a minute."

The stage burned furiously, and the scenes and characters blazed away also, and made a great bonfire. However, the house did not catch fire, though the chimney did, and a terrible roaring noise it made, and a terrible smell of soot also.

Mr. Bowden released his grasp, directed his

attention from me to the chimney, went down on his knees and raked away like a madman with the poker. But though he extinguished the fire in the grate, he could not get up the chimney and put the fire out there, and my mother's alarm was increasing every instant.

I stood where Mr. Bowden had left me, regarding the confusion with inward satisfaction, regarding Mr. Bowden also with glances not the most affectionate.

The room was filling with smoke, my mother was running from one corner to another, praying and weeping; Mr. Bowden was calling for water, and salt, and a long broom, and a hundred other things considered of use in cases of like emergency, and the servant girl was tearing upstairs with the articles demanded. Tom Arrow had disappeared in the confusion, was probably at home by that time, relating the incidents of the evening to his relations.

The chimney continued blazing away—it had not been swept for twelve months at least, and there was a great deal of soot to

burn—and Mr. Bowden's efforts were entirely futile; in fact, he had lost his presence of mind in the confusion, and my mother's alarm did not tend to restore it.

"Can't *you* do something?" cried Mr. Bowden, turning round to me with bloodshot eyes and a perfectly black face; "you are the cause of all this mischief—why do you not make yourself useful?"

"I'm not the cause."

"Don't bandy words with me," he said, passionately; "leave the room! Sarah, my dear," turning to my mother, "don't be alarmed—pray be a little calmer—look at me! It's only the chimney—what a frightful noise it makes—there's not the slightest danger! I'm—I'm only thinking of the expense if they bring the parish engine here. I shall have it out in a minute;" and away he went to work with the long broom again.

But it was not out in a minute, it continued to burn and afford amusement to the Nettleton townsfolk, who had turned out in a body to witness the spectacle and speculate on the sparks falling on some thatched cottages in

the rear, on the distress of mind of the Methodist family, on the disgraceful tardiness of the parish authorities, who had lost the hose, and mislaid the keys of the engine-shed, and could not find the beadle anywhere. The chimney flared on quietly, and the neighbors stood in a row on the other side of the way, gaping up at it; whilst a few of our Methodist flock knocked at the door at irregular intervals, and offered valuable advice, to which no one paid any attention.

The fire was extinguished at last by some enterprising people, who got on the roof of the house and poured several pails of water down the chimney, down all the chimneys in fact, front parlor, the sitting-room upstairs, and every bedroom in the house, and a beautiful mess they made of it, not to speak of the damage done to the fire-irons, hearth-rugs, and carpets. Still, the fire was put out, and very thankful my mother was for it; and very cross with the world, with me, and himself, was Mr. Bowden.

Mr. Bowden did not bestow another word

upon me that evening, did not even ask after my lessons, or my theme on "Religious Education and its effects on Society." He was even out of temper with my mother for not being cool and collected, and went finally up to bed, shaking his head at all mention of supper, and deigning no reply to his helpmate, who called after him "that there was a box of Grook's Pills on the mantel-piece!"

CHAPTER II.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

My pious and estimable step-father was a trifle more severe in his treatment towards me after the memorable evening recorded in the last chapter. Men cast in a softer mould would have changed their tactics, adopted a less rigorous course, and tried the art of gentleness, but Mr. Bowden, who was partial to his own theories, drew the reins of discipline a little tighter, and set a veto on everything I wished. The shadow of his presence seemed to fall upon my heart, my every thought, my home, and all that in old time had helped to

make home happy. I grew more hardened, obstinate, and sullen; I learned my lessons with an ill-grace, I chafed at my restraint, and a secret hate of the Methodist minister began to grow upon me. I made no effort to check it; one earnest appeal, one thorough explanation might have avoided much of evil, but I let the opportunity go by for ever.

My mother was a poor observer; happy herself, and attached to her second husband, she could detect no signs of unhappiness in me. She was glad to see me becoming such a quiet, steady boy, even thanked Mr. Bowden for the change; and when I was unusually dull, she thought my system was a little disarranged, and offered me the eternal Grook's Pills to rectify it.

I might occupy the remainder of this book by giving the details of the long sermon delivered to me by Mr. Bowden on the morning after his act of incendiarism. There was a text, and the discourse was divided into the proper number of heads, and occupied the entire morning. It was all about wilfulness, and indifference, and a wicked

abuse of time, and was, on the whole, very like the condemned sermon with which they favor criminals at Newgate.

My mother was extremely affected; she cried and rocked herself in the chair, and shook her head gravely at me every five minutes; I sat opposite my step-father, with my hands in my pockets, and my eyes fixed on his countenance—a position I maintained till the exhortation was ended.

I made no reply, expressed no contrition for performing the "Miller and his Men" and asking Tom Arrow in to see it, but turned to my lessons in an apathetic manner. My mother thought my feelings were too deep for utterance after so earnest an oration, and she was perfectly right.

Tom Arrow's grandmother called later in the day, and, fortunately for Mr. Bowden, found my step-father absent. That elderly female arrived in a towering passion, and fully prepared to exchange any amount of personalities with anybody who felt inclined to indulge in that amusement. Tom Arrow's grandmother was the terror of Net-

tleton. She was a tall bony old woman, who always wore a mob cap of the washer-woman pattern, and was inclined to walk about the town with her sleeves tucked up to her elbows, and her bonnet perched, after an extraordinary fashion of her own, on the top of her head. She was no credit to a respectable chemist; but then, she was Mrs. Arrow's mother, and had three thousand pounds in the three-per-cents,—a fact which she informed her friends of half-a-dozen times a day. She had been the wife of a respectable master-butcher, whom she had worried to death some twenty years previously. She was a cross-grained, ignorant, atheistical old woman, who had a strong antipathy to churches and church-going people, who was anxious to quarrel with everybody in Nettleton, and who made the home of the Arrows a most uncomfortable residence. Tom Arrow was the only object of her affection, the only one who could obtain a civil word from her, and Tom Arrow, of course, was to have the three thousand pounds in the three-per-cents. when the old

lady died—an event for which everybody was anxiously waiting.

"There's your money, marm, for your rubbishing windows," she cried, banging down four shillings on the table when she was shewn into the room where my mother and I were seated—"and I should like to know where Mr. Bowden is?"

"He's not at home, Mrs. Sanders."

"Of course he isn't when *I* want to see him," said the old lady, ironically, "and of course he wouldn't be if I called a dozen times. Your parsons are always afraid of seeing people, the mean-spirited fellows. I wish I had him here!"

"Do you want him particularly?" meekly inquired my mother.

"I want to know, marm, what business he had to shake my grandson last night—the great, big coward!—and what he meant by putting Tom's cap on the fire, and calling him a rep-repery something—*he* a minister!" with a disparaging elevation of her nose.

My mother continued her needle-work, not at all put out by the excited manner of Mrs.

Sanders, who, finding her objurgations and violent gesticulations expended on empty air, concluded by informing my mother "she was a poor weak-minded creature, and she might tell her psalm-smiting husband so," marched out of the room, and nearly shook the house down by slamming the street-door after her.

When Mr. Bowden was informed of the lady who had been inquiring for him, and of her eccentric behavior towards my mother, he turned to me with the old cry:—

"This is your fault, Robert! You see how one bad action leads to your own disgrace, to my shame, to your mother being insulted under her own roof."

I did not answer.

"I must forbid your further acquaintance with that boy, Arrow," he said. "He is an evil-disposed youth."

"No, he is not."

"I say he is," reiterated Mr. Bowden, with some emphasis; "and I say that this habit of flat contradiction is unseemly and disgraceful."

And Mr. Bowden left the room in high dudgeon.

This game at cross purposes continued all the spring and summer—lasted till the autumn came. Mr. Bowden devoted his spare time to my education, studied my moral welfare, did what he thought his duty earnestly, but my ungracious manners, my unthankfulness did not win upon his heart, and there was no love lost between us. There was this difference between us, however: he wished me well, I wished him harm.

More than once, mother and son have stood side-by-side and watched the head of the family go forth to his labors, one praying for his safety, and the other wishing evil might befall him on his journey. Well for us all that we know not the thoughts of our friends and our neighbours!

In the beginning of the autumn it was customary to hold a fair on Nettleton Common. Nettleton Fair was the one grand event of the year in our county, a rare holiday that was looked forward to for months, and talked of for months afterwards. It was a fair well

supported by the gentry in the neighbourhood, by the inhabitants of every village within a fifteen miles' circuit, by the sober elders of Nettleton itself. It was a red-letter day from which people dated their joys and sorrows and extraordinary occurrences — village children were born so many weeks after Nettleton Fair, or village gaffers died so many days before the same, or people came into little fortunes, or broke their legs, or were taken up for poaching at stated intervals of time, prior or subsequent to the great fair time on the Common. It lasted three days, and, if the weather proved favorable, drew a large number of people together. The amusements were harmless enough, the country sports were good for the health, and the Kiss in the Ring which always celebrated those festivities, was not a very disgraceful exhibition, at least the young people did not think so. Nettleton Fair was too great a distance from London to draw any wild characters, suspicious-looking idlers, or light-fingered gentry together; there was a gathering of honest English peasants and their laughing

wives and daughters, a few sturdy farmers and Nettleton squires, and just a sprinkling of indigenous "roughs."

Mr. Bowden, of course, had his objections to Nettleton Fair; it was a place of sin, an abomination in the eyes of the godly, a gathering together of the weak, the vain, and the abandoned, a temptation to idleness, and full of every kind of debauchery. For one fortnight before Nettleton Fair, Mr. Bowden regularly entertained me and my mother at tea-time with anathemas on the coming festivities. My mother listened and approved of every one of his expressions, and hoped I would not want to go that year—"I was a big boy now, and ought to consider myself above such things!"

When the dusty caravans began to arrive on the Common, and an army of nomadic tribes to encamp there, I found voice to express a desire to attend the fair as usual.

Mr. Bowden's feelings were hurt, for the fortnight's lectures on the profanity of fair-time had been intended especially for me.

"To go to the fair!" he exclaimed, flinging up both hands.

"Oh! Robert, dear," sighed my mother.

"I have been every year since we have lived in Nettleton. You took me yourself last year, mother, when Mr. Bowden was our lodger. You thought there was no harm in it, then."

"Yes, dear," replied my mother, coughing faintly to hide her embarrassment; "but you were younger then—and—and I did not see all the evil in fairs which your father has so kindly pointed out."

"My father," I muttered to myself.

I had never called Mr. Bowden 'father' since his marriage, despite my mother's wish to that effect. The word would have choked me in the attempt. *My* father had loved me with his whole heart, and thought nothing too good for me; I could not call his very antithesis by a similar name.

"Your mother, I fear, Robert, waived her own reluctance to oblige you," said Mr. Bowden, "and your mother was in fault. She will know better this time."

"I can go by myself."

"Robert!" whispered my mother.

"I will be home before dark."

Mr. Bowden began to clear his throat, and I to double my fists under the table, and look daggers at my reflection in the tea-pot.

"Robert, lad," said my step-father in a milder tone than I had anticipated, "will you believe for once that I and your mother are not anxious to aggravate you by an unfair opposition to your wishes? Come, boy, don't look so black, give in for once with a good grace! You have seen the fair many times, I daresay, and so there is no novelty to tempt you. There's an end of it. We will say no more of the evils or dangers in the way; we will drop the subject."

This appeal, frankly made as it was, might have had its effect nine months ago; but now that I had become hardened by eternal opposition, had made up my mind to go, had even promised Tom Arrow, whose acquaintance with me had been interdicted, to meet him at the Round pond on the Common in the afternoon of the first day, it was too hard upon

me, and I could not give in, even to my best friends.

"I have not been anywhere this summer," I remonstrated, "have hardly had a single holiday—I shall go."

"You shall NOT go," cried Mr. Bowden, losing patience. "I expressly forbid it, you wilful and disobedient boy. If you fly in the face of my strict commands, you have but yourself to thank for the result."

And Mr. Bowden, thinking the effect of his injunctions might be weakened by a longer stay, rose from the tea-table and went into the garden.

My mother wistfully regarded me as I sat with lips compressed staring at the distorted image of bottled indignation in the tea-pot. It was several minutes before either of us spoke, and the Dutch clock in the corner ticked away noisily.

"Robert, my dear boy," said my mother at last in a faint voice, "you will not think of going now?"

"Yes."

"You will not go?"

"Yes, I will."

"For my sake. You will make me so unhappy!"

My lip quivered. I wanted to cry, to burst forth into a passionate fit of weeping, cursing, and reproaching; but I struggled with myself, and kept my passions down.

"Think of the harm it may do. Of the offence it may give your father."

"Don't call him my father!"

"He *would* be a father to you, Robert."

"I will never let him!" I retorted bitterly.

"You will please *me*, then, by not going."

"Mother, I WILL go—I have been thwarted long enough. Let him do his worst, I'll go! If I knew I were to die for it, he should not stop me!"

I jumped up from my chair, flung the tea-cup at the slop-basin, and cracked them both, and paced the room with heavy tread.

"It's the old song, 'for my good,' and I have stood that goodness long enough. Mother, I will have no more of it!"

My mother tried to pacify me, to assure me of everybody's good intentions, to beg me

to be calm before Mr. Bowden's return, crying and clasping her hands meanwhile.

I calmed down at her request, but to all her solicitations to change my mind and be a good boy I shook my head in stern dissent. Mr. Bowden returned; the tea-things were carried downstairs; my mother began her needle-work; and I commenced learning my lessons for the morrow.

The days passed on, and the fair-day came at length. No more had been said concerning Mr. Bowden's interdict; my mother thought that time had softened my obduracy, and my step-father did not believe in my hardihood to break forth into open defiance.

What a fine sunshiny day it was, what a blue sky to be free under, and have no Methodist minister to plague me! Not a word was spoken concerning the fair, though it was the uppermost thought in each of our minds. The gay streamers were flying from the roofs of tents and shows, there was extra bustle in the roadway outside my mother's house, the noise of children talking, the sounds of country carts jolting past the door, the

strains of far off music, the ring of holiday-folks' laughter on the Common.

I sat at my lessons in the back parlor, with Mr. Bowden before me, writing. When he had finished his letters, and had retired from the room, I darted into the front parlor, and looked through the window at Nettleton Common. The people were not flocking thither in great numbers yet; it was early, and the Nettleton tradesmen had their morning's orders to attend to. Still, a country cart or a farmer's waggon, filled with spruce country lads and lasses, passed every two minutes, and the happiness on the faces of the rustics made me envious. I looked across the Common at the tents three-quarters of a mile off. It was a large fair; there were more booths than ever, and as for the herds of sheep and bullocks—for the first day was also a cattle fair—they were grouped in all directions.

I was back in my place before Mr. Bowden returned to hear my lessons, which I rehearsed to his satisfaction, for he said, "Very well done, Robert"—a compliment that did not cheer me up in the least. At our early

dinner, still no mention of the fair, although the horses and carts were passing the door rapidly, and the Bell Inn was in a state of siege. Mr. Bowden talked of everything but the fair—of the weather in general, of the present fine day in particular, of my educational progress, of the fine harvest we had had, of the housekeeping, of the state of Methodism in Nettleton, of his last sermon, of his next one. I ate my dinner sullenly enough, keeping one eye on the clock in the corner, the hour hand of which was nearing figure two. Tom Arrow was to meet me at the Round pond at two o'clock, he was on his way thither then; how the time was flying onward, and the precious minutes drifting by!

A single heavy knock at the door. My heart rose in my throat. Had Tom Arrow, with the coolest effrontery, ventured to call for me?

The small servant entered the room.

"If you please, sir, here's Harris, from the Shrubberies, at Westock."

Mr. Bowden sprang from his seat and left

the room. I could hear his voice in the passage saying :—

"Well, Harris, what is it?"

(Harris and his family were humble members of Nettleton chapel.)

"The old lady's worse, sir. She seems anxious like to see you, if so be as you can manage to coom, measter."

"Certainly. I'll come directly."

Mr. Bowden re-entered the room. My heart felt lighter. Here was a chance of going to Nettleton fair without my worthy step-father's knowledge. Westock was four miles distant, and he could not possibly go thither, comfort the old lady—I prayed fervently the comfort would last a long while—and return, in less time than three hours.

"Poor dame Harris is worse, Sarah. I must go and see her directly."

"Poor old lady," said my sympathizing mother.

Mr. Bowden's eyes rested on me. A bright thought seemed to flash upon him.

"I think I will take Robert. It's a beautiful day, and the walk will do him good."

"It is a pity to lose such fine weather," assented my mother. "Robert, go upstairs and wash your face; your father is kind enough to offer to take you with him."

It was no use remonstrating—they were playing one game, I another—the last move was to decide it. I went out of the room, stole downstairs instead of upstairs, and entered the front kitchen.

No one about; the servant maid in the back kitchen, scrubbing something vigorously and hissing like an ostler; my cap handy on the dresser, the window open, the sun shining outside, the people going to the fair!

Is it not David Garrick, in the old print, who hesitates between Tragedy and Comedy, uncertain which to choose; led by Melpomene the stately, yet lingering still with laughing Thalia?

As with David Garrick the Immortal, so with Robert Woodleigh the Erring; Tragedy, in the shape of Mr. Bowden in his black garments, sought to lead me one way; Thalia, with her short robe fluttering in the autumn

wind, frolicked on Nettleton Common, and beckoned me to disobedience.

Light-hearted youth, with his veins full of life, cares not for Tragedy—time enough when the pulse beats feebly for the dagger and bowl, the dreary five acts of existence, with a death always at the end of them! Comedy is for the spring-time, when care sits lightly on the shoulders, and folly smiles and tempts us.

A little struggle with my conscience, a little thought for the result, a little headstrong will of mine resisting Prudence and garotting her, and then I crept through the window after Comedy, and left Tragedy fidgeting in the back parlor, and wondering what detained me.

CHAPTER III.

NETTLETON FAIR.

I FOUND Tom Arrow at the extreme edge of the Round pond, pitching stones into the water in a disconsolate manner. His face brightened up when I arrived, rather short of breath.

"So you have come, Bob," was his first salutation. "I'm so glad, old fellow? I thought the parson would not let you out. He's not such a bad sort after all, is he, now?"

"I did not tell him I was coming to the fair. I took French leave, Tom, I could get no other."

Tom gave vent to his significant but dreary whistle.

"I'm sorry for that, though. You'll catch it when you get back, won't you?"

"He has never laid a hand upon me yet—he never shall but once."

"Well, here we are, Bob, and he can't hinder you seeing the fair, let him whack you ever so hard," said he; "let's be moving. There are some fine shows, I can tell you. There's a learned pig, and a spotted boy, and a woman without hands and feet, who cuts out watch-papers with her toes, and lots of other wonderful things—what's the matter?"

"I came out in a hurry—I forgot to go to my money-box—I—"

"Oh! never mind that," said Tom, with his usual indifference to money affairs, "my grandmother gave me a shilling before I started, and here's half of it. Lay hold, there's a good chap."

"But—"

"But you can pay me to-morrow, you know. Come on."

We were soon in the thickest of Nettleton

fair, had soon run against other boys of the town, with whom we immediately fraternized. Nettleton fair was filling with people; the gingerbread-dealers were driving a brisk trade; the shows had each its crowd of Hodges and Joans before the doors, and the proprietors were proclaiming loudly the merits of their entertainments, and slapping the large illustrative sheets of canvas with their canes; there were swings and roundabouts, and gipsy women telling fortunes; drinking-booths, filled with graziers, cattle-drivers, farmers, men and dogs; there were herds of oxen and sheep, pigs and calves; there was dancing to a fiddle on one part of the Common, a jingling match in another, kiss in the ring in four places at once; there were sharp-sighted beggars, and beggars without sight at all, tumblers, Punch and Judy, a cheap Jack, toys on sticks to be thrown at thrice for the small charge of one penny; everything, in fact, that Tom and I could wish for. Still, I did not enjoy the scene at first; the sense of my desertion from home marred my appreciation of the festivities, and my boy's heart was heavy.

Fortunately the effect wore off; the crowds of country people in their Sunday best, the attraction of the shows, the laughter and rough jesting, the excitement of the moment soon made me forgetful of the past and careless of the future; I no longer looked nervously over my shoulder and thought of Mr. Bowden, I plunged into the sea of dissipation, the waters of oblivion flowed over my head, and my Methodist friends were forgotten.

Time passed rapidly enough; there were so many things to distract the attention, so many booths to see outside, and a few to visit inside—thanks to Tom Arrow's grandmother — that Nettleton church-clock was striking six before the time came into my head at all.

"There's six o'clock, Tom," I said as the home thoughts rushed back to me, and pictures of Mr. Bowden returning from Westock, of my mother standing at the front window looking anxiously across the Common for the runaway, of Charlotte, the maid, making inquiries in the town concerning me, passed vividly before my mind's eye.

"I wouldn't go home now, Bob," said Tom.

"Why not?"

"You won't catch it any more for stopping an hour or two longer," said he in a consoling manner; "and you may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb."

"A black sheep?"

"Ha, ha! black sheep if you like—that's what Squire Heberdeen called you."

"It is a name that is likely to stick by me," I answered, "for I'm not much of a lamb, I'm afraid, Tom. Come on, boys," I cried recklessly to my companions, "I wont go home, there! Hurrah for a long night of it—let's come and see the Spotted Boy!"

We dashed into the heart of the fair again, and were soon pushing and fighting our way through the mob of idlers. It was growing dusk, the fair was beginning to illuminate, some of the most respectable people were retiring, some of the most disreputable were coming in. It was quite time for boys to be at their mother's knees again, relating the day's wonders they had seen.

Seven o'clock striking, and a stir in Nettleton fair. Squire Heberdeen and son had condescended to honor the scene with their presence, and there was nothing but bowing and scraping and touching of hats. Since that time I have had an opportunity of contrasting the respect paid to crowned heads in London with the homage bestowed on great men, lords of the manor, and so forth in the country, and the country magnates have the advantage. Every man who lives in a large house, who keeps his carriage, his pack of hounds and his hunters, is a king out of town, and has plenty of subjects to do him reverence.

Squire Heberdeen lounged through the fair with his round good-looking face all smiles, and Squire Heberdeen's son strutted by his side, rather more important than his father. Squire Heberdeen made purchases at some of the booths, and ordered them to be sent home in the course of the evening; and the little stall-keepers bustled about, ducked their heads and said "Yes, your honor" to everything.

Country people being always curious, there was a small knot of gaping rustics in

attendance on the Squire and his son; and as Tom Arrow and my friends were as inquisitive as the rest, we helped to swell the humble *cortége* in the rear.

Master Heberdeen, who had caught sight of Arrow and me, and who, with a boy's vanity, was anxious to show off in our presence, made his purchases also, and invested money in a fishing-rod, a box of paints, and a large wax doll. Tom winked at me when Master Heberdeen bought the doll, and said in a whisper:—

"That's for his sister."

"No, it is not, Tom."

"For his sweetheart, perhaps."

"No, for himself; don't you see what a great girl he is!"

Tom burst into an outrageous roar of laughter, and Squire Heberdeen's son turned round, purse in hand. There were some silver coins glittering through the net-work, but Master Heberdeen was anxious to display a real golden sovereign which he was holding between his finger and thumb ostentatiously.

"Don't change your sovereign, Ned," I

heard the Squire say, as his son, looking Tom full in the face, asked, "What he was laughing at?"

"Nothing," said Tom.

"Mayn't he laugh, young stuck-up?" bawled a rough voice behind us, and at the same instant I and my companions experienced a heave forward, which brought us with a grand rush against the Squire, his son, the fancy-stall and its keeper.

The Squire rapped out a loud oath as he staggered against the counter and tilted it completely over, burying the owner under the *débris;* several heads were knocked together, Tom fell down on his face, and Squire Heberdeen's son stumbled and dropped his sovereign.

"My sovereign, my sovereign!" he cried, pushing right and left, and looking about him anxiously.

"Stand back there—the young Squire has lost some money—stand farther back!" were a few of the exclamations heard amidst the confusion that ensued. But although we stood farther back, and looked for Master

Heberdeen's money, no sovereign was forthcoming; it had disappeared for ever.

"Perhaps it's rolled under the stall," suggested a loutish-looking vagabond, with a gipsy cast of countenance.

"No, no—it rolled your way—I saw it."

"Then it *must* be somewhere about," said he, commencing a diligent search, thrusting the people aside, and even looking at the sole of each of his boots, under the delusion that it had got fixed between the variety of hobnails which embellished it. But the sovereign was not to be found, and Squire Heberdeen, who had lost his temper, told his son he was a fool to bring it out with him.

"It's all through these fellows," the son said, pointing to our group—"they're always insulting me. I believe one of them has got it. I believe *you*"—infuriated at my contemptuous expression of countenance—"have got it, if anybody has!"

I reddened. I felt my ears tingling and my hands forming themselves into tight little balls.

"See how he colors, pa — look at him — he's got it!"

"You're a liar, Ned Heberdeen!" I shouted, "and if you say I'm a thief again, I'll knock you down. I'm not frightened of you, or any one like you, because you live in a great house and have got a rich father. Don't say I stole your money!"

And, like a small fury as I was, I marched close to his side and looked him in the face. He set his teeth and glared at me—he doubled his fists, too, and stood his ground courageously.

"Stand back, you young hound—you are always in mischief!" roared the Squire, giving me a thrust with his great hand that sent me staggering into the midst of the crowd. I was breathing hard, and getting ready for a rush at Squire Heberdeen's legs, when another hand forced itself down my jacket, and four bony knuckles inserted themselves in the back of my neck.

"Come home, sir!"

I recognized the voice directly—the deep harsh voice of my step-father, I knew it

was he, though I could only catch a glimpse from the corner of my left eye of a black coat-sleeve.

"I have been looking for you the last hour, sir!" said my step-father, sternly.

"Take him home, parson," cried the Squire, "and thrash him soundly. He is the plague of all Nettleton."

"Squire Heberdeen need not prompt me in my duty," said Mr. Bowden. "I am sufficiently acquainted with it."

"Why don't you take more care of him, then? If he had been a son of mine, I would have flogged the wickedness out of him long ago."

"You have a son of your own, sir, to bring up," said Mr. Bowden, loftily; "from all reports, not the most amiable or docile. The education of that son is your task—you have no right to interfere with mine."

"Do you taunt me, Mr. Methodist?" said the Squire, with a laugh.

"I do not taunt you—I do not desire further discussion with you."

Mr. Bowden turned his back on Squire

Heberdeen and prepared to lead me homewards. Squire Heberdeen, who was nettled at my step-father's coolness, said something in a light tone concerning 'canting hypocrites,' which elicited a loud laugh from the majority of people near him. Mr. Bowden faced the Squire once more.

"Squire Heberdeen, since I have been in Nettleton, I have heard much in your favor, witnessed, myself, the result of many acts of kindness. I have learned something more today."

"What's that?" he asked.

"That a man may earn a good name in the town, and occupy a high position in the county, and yet be as deficient in all gentlemanly courtesy as the most ignorant clodpole at his side."

Squire Heberdeen turned scarlet in the face as my step-father led me away, but he hazarded no reply to the reproof; the Methodist parson was a sharper man than he had anticipated, and Squire Heberdeen was not a wit of the first water.

Retaining his hold of my collar, Mr.

Bowden, very erect and dignified, marched me ignominiously through the fair; Tom Arrow and his friends, desirous of seeing the last of me, following at a respectful distance. People stared at us as we passed through the avenue of booths, and speculated loudly as to the meaning of the procession. Those who came from a distance thought I had stolen something, and that Mr. Bowden was a disguised policeman; those to whom we were well known whispered "it's the minister and his bad step-son—young Woodleigh, an idle scamp—a black sheep!"

CHAPTER IV.

EXIT ROBERT.

My mother was sitting in the back-parlor, with her apron over her face, when we entered. I saw that her eyes were red and swollen with crying as she lowered her apron and shook her head reproachfully.

"Oh! Robert, Robert, how could you do it!"

"I have done no harm," I answered, sullenly.

"I found him in the midst of the riotous assembly, Sarah," said Mr. Bowden, releasing his hold for the first time; "quarrelling with the son of Squire Heberdeen and challenging

him to fight. Is it not time to try severe measures, now it has come to this?"

"I fear it is," moaned my mother; "oh! my poor boy, to think, with all my love and care, that you should prove so wicked."

"Squire Heberdeen's son told me that I was a thief. He said I stole his sovereign —the villain!"

"And your defence was an attempt to strike him," said Mr. Bowden; "did that make your innocence more apparent, think you?"

I did not answer.

"Had I been Squire Heberdeen's son, I should have been inclined to believe you guilty by your very airs of insolent bravado."

"You would think any ill of me!"

"Still sullen and ungracious," said my stepfather; "not one expression of regret for your deception, for your last flagrant act of disobedience? Still full of the promptings of the evil one!"

"Why is my life to be made miserable? why is everything I do called wrong?"

"Poor boy, poor boy," said Mr. Bowden to himself, as he commenced pacing the room; "so young and yet so hardened! Sarah, this behaviour must be checked."

"Oh! dear me, yes," murmured my mother.

Mr. Bowden stopped and turned to me again.

"Robert, give me your cap."

The cap was still on my head, and I gave it a defiant pull over my forehead, and scowled at him from under the peak.

"What for?"

"*Give—me—that—cap*," said Mr. Bowden, slowly and firmly.

"Give your father the cap directly, Robert," said my mother, in sharper tones than she had ever used to me before.

"Let him tell me what he wants with it."

"I will tell you," said Mr. Bowden; "I want to keep it—to lock it in my desk. One fortnight you will remain in-doors, sir, as a punishment for your wickedness of this afternoon; after that period has expired, you may go out with me or your mother, but never by

yourself alone, until we think you more deserving of our confidence. Give me the cap."

He made a step towards me, and I made a step backwards, then we both came to a full stop again.

"Sarah," said he to my mother, "this must be a painful scene to you, and—ahem—you will be rather in the way, my dear, if I have to run round the table after him—had you not better go into the front-parlor?"

"Give your father the cap, Robert."

I was growing more obstinate and more full of evil passions—even the fiery looks of Mr. Bowden did not terrify me.

"He shan't lock up my cap—he has no right."

"Robert," said Mr. Bowden, "my first intention this afternoon, after the discovery of your wilful disobedience, was to flog you soundly, but I have altered my determination. Your nature is a peculiar one, and a severe but just restraint will work upon you more, and bring forth, I trust, some better traits of character than have lately been exhibited.

Something must be done, for you know not your best friends, and are ignorant of what is good for you."

"You cannot teach me to be good," I cried, "for you know nothing of my nature. You did not know what was best for your own daughter, for she turned against you long ago!"

Mr. Bowden started.

"Mrs. Bowden, pray retire."

My mother went out of the room. The strong man and the rebellious boy looked each other in the face.

"Give me the cap."

"Not to lock up," I muttered.

He advanced towards me, I backed towards the wall. He followed at a grave pace, I continued my retrograde movement close to the wall, behind the chairs, round the table, past the fire-place, back to the same spot again, Mr. Bowden keeping step.

Suddenly he made a rush, and I darted more quickly round the chairs, upsetting one, tumbling over another, gathering myself together again, and dodging round the table in a style that would have won the admiration

of Tom Arrow. But Mr. Bowden was too quick for me, or his arms were too long, for one large hand fastened at last upon my cap, and on my hair within it, and the other fell upon my ears, right and left—right and left, with four tremendous thwacks that precipitated me on the hearth-rug.

Trembling in every limb, and mad with passion, I scrambled to my feet, rushed at the mantel-piece, and seizing thence the blue and yellow shepherdess, hurled it with all my force at Mr. Bowden's head. He threw up the hand which held my cap, but it was too late; the stone-china shepherdess alighted on Mr. Bowden's nose and mouth, and nearly knocked him backwards.

There was an end to calmness after that; Mr. Bowden *could* lose his temper and forget his duties, he was not all philosophy. He made a second rush at me, caught me by the arm, and, as the blood streamed from his nose and mouth, and two out of his four bottom teeth slipped down his throat, he laid on to my head and ears with an abandonment which said little for his power of self-command.

I bore my punishment with a heroism that was worthy of a better cause; I neither cried nor begged for mercy; I stood and warded off the blows as well as I could with my arms, until an opportunity of escape presenting itself, I made a dash at the door, flung it open, and tore out of the room. Carried away by the excitement of the moment, Mr. Bowden offered chase, ran up four stairs after me, slipped on the fifth, and came down with his sore nose and mouth on the sharp corner of the stairs. I flew into my own room, double-locked the door, and, sinking into a chair before the dressing-table, stared at my flushed, rage-swollen face in the looking-glass. I succumbed to no fit of childish weeping when I was alone; my passion was too great, it seemed to have changed my nature, and made a demon of me.

I dashed my hand upon the dressing-table, and gave vent to all the evil wishes of the moment; wishes that the hand might wither which had struck me, that my step-father might die that night, or, if he did not, that a time might come for my revenge. There was

a secret desire in my thoughts, also, to do something strange and awful, that should show Mr. Bowden and my mother how little I cared for their wishes, how utterly I despised them.

I rose and paced the room, despite the pain the movement caused me; I flung myself on the floor with a crash, even opened the window and speculated on the sensation I should create by falling headlong from it, then I resumed my place before the glass, and stared at my worst enemy within it.

The twilight deepened in my room, the darkness fell around me, the hum of voices on Nettleton Common sounded in my ears—voices that were singing country ballads, laughing voices, voices whose very echo told of happiness. When the stars came out, and all was black within the room, a rustling noise was heard without my door, and light fingers sounded on the panels.

I did not move from my position, and after a pause the tap was repeated, and my mother's soft voice whispered:—

"Robert!"

I held my peace. There was no power in my mother's gentle words to soften me.

"Robert, dear!"

No answer.

"Robert, will you come down and have some supper?"

A long, long pause—my mother waiting patiently.

"Your father will not scold you any more to-night—will not touch you again, dear. Do answer me."

Stern silence—at that moment I would not have uttered a word to save my life.

My mother, with a heavy sigh, went downstairs again, and all was still till Nettleton clock was striking ten.

At that hour Mr. Bowden, as well as my mother, came upstairs to my room door, and the tapping outside was repeated.

"Robert," called my mother again.

"Robert, thir, I inthith upon a reply!" demanded Mr. Bowden in his harshest tones; but with a disjointed kind of lisp that was entirely new, and for which the blue and yellow shepherdess was answerable.

Mr. Bowden "inthithed" again, but no reply was deigned.

"Perhaps he is not there—perhaps he is ill. Perhaps he went downstairs after — *afterwards*. Oh! Jacob, dear, if he has run away from home!"

Run away from home! My hands clenched, my heart beat fast. Run away from home! —WHY NOT?

What was home to me now? I thought; a gaol — a prison-house wherein every harsh restraint was to be exercised— a place which I was never to leave for a moment without a watch upon me, and in which I had no friend, not even in my mother!

In my growing excitement I forgot my caution, and stamped with both my feet.

"He is there," I heard my mother whisper; "I heard him move."

"Yeth—he ith thafe enough—I wath thertain of it."

One more attempt to elicit a reply from me, and then my mother and her husband went downstairs to their room. An hour longer in my old position, fostering

strange thoughts within my mind—thoughts which my mother had suggested in her own anxiety.

To unfasten my door, steal down the dark stairs, open a door or window, pass through into the street, run away and be never heard of more! How they would repent then of their rigor; how the stern Methodist would reproach himself with over-strictness, with being the cause of his wife's unhappiness—torture himself with thinking of the wilful boy he had helped to cast upon the world!

Whither should I go?—further into the country, get a place as farmer's-boy under a disguised name, or join the gipsies in Nettleton Woods, and dye my hands and face with walnut-juice? The last idea was an attractive one, but almost too romantic to be practicable; the gipsies would possibly rob me of my clothes, stow me away in some dismal hole or thicket, and cover me decently with leaves. Should I go to London, find out my uncle—he was my own father's brother, and no Methodist!—tell him the

whole truth, and ask to be his errand-boy?

London! — the great city where fortunes were made from small beginnings, and men without a penny rose to fame and wealth,— where my uncle was—my cousins; where my father had lived and died; where there were no Mr. Bowdens to box one's ears and make one's head ache; where they would never find me!

I crossed the room, took my money-box from the mantel-piece, and felt the weight of it. I had been saving lately; Mr. Bowden had taught me the necessity of saving. There were at least eight shillings and sixpence within the box, besides some coppers,—that sum would buy me a sixpenny cap in the next town, and take me to London in a third-class railway-train, or in a waggon, or on the top of a stage-coach. London was only fifty miles away,—why, I could walk it in three days!

The stubbornness of my nature, the spirit of resistance, the satisfaction of making Mr. Bowden and my mother miserable,—was not

my mother turning against me?—helped on these thoughts, and strengthened me.

Yes, — I would run away from home! When the hour was late, and all Nettleton asleep, I would steal from the house that I had learned to hate, and, by a circuitous route that should elude pursuit, proceed to London. Younger lads than I had been thrown upon their own resources, and worked their way upwards in the world,—why not Robert Woodleigh, a youth not particularly sensitive, one who could stand the world's buffetings and not give way to despair in a hurry?

I took off my boots, and walked cat-like about the room. I gathered, or rather groped, into a bundle my Sunday-clothes, my three new shirts, two pairs of socks, my lay-down collars, the hair-brush, and a little flute of mine. I broke open my money-box and put its contents in my pocket, all except sixpence, which I wrapped in a piece of paper, and intended to slip under Tom Arrow's father's door.

Then, with my bundle on my knees, I sat down, and waited for a later hour.

Two o'clock striking from Nettleton Church! With a trembling touch I opened noiselessly my door, and went upon the dark landing, my bundle in one hand, my boots in the other. One moment of reflection, a slight sinking within me, a feeling of heart-sickness, then I crept downstairs.

Before the door of my mother's room—*their room*—and listening. The door was ajar—should I look in, or go away?

I pushed the door open, and looked in. The night-lamp burning on the table; Mr. Bowden snoring unmelodiously through his bruised nose, his back towards me, and his night-cap half off his head, in a tipsy manner; my mother sleeping restlessly, dreaming, perhaps, of me and danger.

The tears rose to my eyes, and for the first time my stubborn will was shaken. I was going away without a word to that mother who loved me—her only boy—so dearly!

I paused on the threshold of that room, and dashed the drops from my eyes with an impetuous hand, and chid myself for cowardice. "I should be happier away," the

tempter whispered; "everybody was against me here!"

Well, then—good bye! God bless you, mother,—may you be happier without me,—I know you will not, still the wish goes for something;—good bye!

The clock on the staircase asked, "'Till when?—'Till when?"

'Till when, indeed! 'Till I am settled in the great city!—till I am a man,—till death claims that gentle mother, and I come back, perhaps, into the same chamber, darkened as now, and look at her in her coffin? God forbid that!

Down stairs—my boots on again—the street-door opened softly—the moonlit street of the old town before me—the white tents of the fair gleaming in the distance. I hesitated to close the door behind me, lest the noise should startle the slumberers and set pursuers on my track;—still there might be rough characters about—it was fair-time—my mother might be robbed.

I drew the door to with a careful hand—the lock went easily—a click—the door closed;

and I was standing, bare-headed, in the free air, with my unknown road before me!

There was no map of life to guide me on my way, — no danger-signals to warn the wanderer where the pitfalls lurked, and where the snares,—no signs to show under which bright vapor lurked temptation,—along what stony paths were Honesty and Virtue to be met with.

The dark veil hung before me, and hid the good and evil, and my eyes were blinded as I set forth to seek my fortunes.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK III.

"God give you morrow, sir; lack you not a neat, handsome, and cleanly young lad, about the age of fifteen or sixteen years?"

GEORGE PEELE.

"A deep occult philosopher."

BUTLER.

CHAPTER I.

A PHILOSOPHER.

If this were the third canto of an epic-poem it would be my duty to burst forth with a grand Ode to Liberty; if a novel, it would be my fate to immediately fall into danger or among thieves—to rescue a distressed damsel, or be rescued myself from tyrants and persecutors; to meet a flattering stranger, perhaps, as Gil Blas did at Pennaflor; or an Artful Dodger, as Oliver Twist did at Barnet.

But, alas! I am no hero of a story-book—there are no heroical qualities in me to make this veracious history romantic; my character stares me in the face from the title-page of this book, and I cannot, as Landor says,

"Draw my robe round me, let the folds fall gracefully, and look majestic!"

This is a chronicle of faults, failings, and shortcomings—a record of the good deeds of Robert Woodleigh would never fill three volumes.

I walked my twenty miles the first day, buying a cap in my progress, and sleeping in the evening at an out-of-the-way inn, where the charge for my accommodation was extremely reasonable. I was a big boy for my age, and no one suspected that I had run away from home—everybody believed my assertion that I was going to a new place in London, and that, being short of money, I preferred walking my way thither in an independent fashion. I went by a circuitous route, and eluded all pursuit. Before the sun shone on Nettleton, I had passed through all the villages wherein some one might have recognized me and set my step-father on my track. In the afternoon of the second day, I came, with dusty clothes and with boots awfully down at heel, to the green banks of the winding river Thames. Being tired with

sixteen miles' sharp walking, I sat down, placed my bundle at my side, and looked around me. It had been a fine day, too fine for a never-ending walk along a dusty road, with the sun upon me all the way, and a rest by the water-side, under the shade of a drooping willow, was a temptation not to be resisted. I looked at the sun, and thought it must be five o'clock at least; I looked in a dreamy manner at the clouds floating overhead; I watched the waters rippling by, bound Londonwards, like me; I stretched myself full length on the grass, and thought of Nettleton. Two days had cooled my temper to a certain extent. I thought more of my mother, and less of my own outraged dignity, although my ears seemed still tingling beneath the hard hands of Mr. Bowden. Poor mother! still grieving, I knew, for her undutiful son; still refusing to be comforted by her new husband; still hoping midst her sorrow that I would come back a penitent, and, by a new life, atone for all that had passed.

However, I had no desire to return to Net-

tleton, despite the uncertainty of the future, or the knowledge that in a day or two more I should be without a penny in my pocket. There was a sense of freedom that pleased me; I was my own master, and had no one to dictate to me; the world was all before me where to choose!

The very uncertainty of the coming events had its charm. 'Better to be begging in the London streets,' I thought, 'than reciting lessons to my grim step-parent in that wretched parlor, which looked on the gooseberry-bushes, the cabbages, and water-butt. There was my uncle to stretch forth a helping hand, to take me home, perhaps, and adopt me. He was not such a bad uncle in old time; he has never seen me without giving me a shilling, and he and my father had agreed very well together.'

Thinking of the future and the past, with the sun sinking in the west; the clouds—fair type of life's chances—floating by, light clouds and dark clouds following one another and drifting fast away; with the river flowing on towards the world of London; the birds singing in the

trees, or flitting by me quicker than my thoughts; the insects in their own little troubled world passing and repassing at my side, some of them running away from home!

Future and past still before me, but getting more confused; Mr. Bowden, in some mysterious manner, identified with uncle Woodleigh; the clouds above receding from me, and everything becoming misty; Robert Woodleigh, with one arm supporting his head, nodding drowsily over his bundle, and travelling on to dream-land.

* * * * * * *

"Ahem! young man, do you mean to sleep there all night?"

I sat up, opened my eyes, rubbed them, and stared hard at my questioner. I had certainly been asleep; the sun was lower in the heavens, the shadows of the trees were longer on the grass, and the gentleman before me, who had evidently been making a sketch of me in his note-book, was not there when I lost all consciousness of present things.

He was a tall, spare man, whose long grey moustache and small bright eyes struck me at first sight. He seemed a gentleman, too, although his boots were thick, his coat well worn, and his hat decidedly shabby. He was a man who might have been anything between thirty-five and fifty years of age, and the lines upon his face were very deeply marked.

"What time is it, sir?"

He took an old silver watch from his waistcoat pocket, replaced it, and informed me it was a quarter-past six.

"How far am I from London now?"

"About five-and-thirty miles," he replied, shutting up his note book.

"Heigho! I am sorry it's so far."

"Have you been walking much to-day, friend?" he asked, with a glance at my well-worn boots.

"Fifteen miles."

"Fair walking for one so young," said he, attentively regarding me, "but a walk that seems to have taken the spirit out of you. You look done up."

"Oh, no!" said I, rising to my feet and

tucking my bundle under my arm—"I am not so easily done up, sir."

"You are from the country, of course."

"Why of course?" I asked.

"We Londoners don't see many pairs of rosy cheeks in the Great City, don't hear very often that country burr—the English brogue as it were—twelve miles round St. Paul's. Have you come from Buckinghamshire?"

"That way," I answered, evasively.

"Ah! that way," with another sharp look in my direction; "very properly answered, young gentleman. Never be too communicative with roadside stragglers, lest you fall into mischief or the hands of the spoiler. You are very young to come tramping up to London without a soul to take care of you. Not fifteen years of age yet, I guess?"

"Fifteen next month."

We were walking side by side along the country road, glancing curiously at each other, and becoming, I believe, rather interested in each other. It was a relief to get

some one to converse with, and especially some one who came from London, and could enlighten me on many points of which I was ignorant.

"An early age to begin the world," he observed. "Have you left a mother at home?"

"Yes."

"Did *she* recommend you to leave her, and seek your own fortune?"

"No," I answered with a flushed cheek.

"Had I been in your place, young fellow, I should have waited at least two more years before I had shaken the dust of home from my feet. 'There's no place like home,' you know, and you'll not find a friend in all London like that mother you are taking French leave of."

"French leave," I repeated.

"Ay, ay," said the sharp gentleman, "you are a bad hand at a secret, for you have betrayed it already, to my thinking. You are a runaway!"

"Well," said I, defiantly, "what if I am?"

"Nothing to me," said he, with a short and

somewhat unpleasant laugh; "I would not take the trouble to detain you or place you under the care of the next policeman; your mother is well rid of you, doubtless, and if you be determined to see the world, it is not the mother's apron-strings that will keep you away from it."

"It was not the mother—"

I stopped.

The stranger nodded his head.

"Who was it, then?"

"No matter."

"Was it the father, of whom you were tired, or the step-father?—that is nearer the mark, eh? Oh, these step-fathers, what villains they are to high-spirited youths whose bumps of veneration are not largely developed!"

"Are you lodging near here?"

"I sleep at the Half-way-House to-night," he replied; "why do you ask?"

"I thought you might know of some place where I could get a bed—a cheap one."

"The Half-way-House can accommodate you."

"Oh, no—not me!"

"I have taken a bed there, it being a secluded retreat, and conducted on economical principles—you'll get nothing cheaper, except a haystack."

"But you are a gentleman."

He gave another of those short unpleasant laughs, and shook his head.

"Not with a gentleman's pocket, at any rate, for I am just comfortably poor."

"I don't understand you."

"It is not everybody who does," he said, in a slightly egotistical manner; "if we should chance to see more of each other this evening, perhaps I'll condescend to explain myself, stranger of fifteen summers. Do you see that sign-post yonder?"

"Yes."

"That's the Half-way-House. Half way to what or where, the Lord only knows, for I don't, neither does the landlord, cadaverous wretch that he is!"

We walked nearly the rest of the way towards the roadside inn in silence—my companion trimming his nails with a penknife and

whistling softly over the operation. We walked very slowly too, for the stranger was a dawdler—never did a man six feet in height, with long legs to correspond, use his locomotive powers more sparingly. He drew one foot after another in the most leisurely manner, and although I was tired and had already tramped my fifteen miles that day, I found it painful to fall in with so slow a rate of progression.

"Am I hurrying you?" he coolly asked at last.

"Oh, no."

A long silence, unbroken till we arrived at the Half-way-House—a small inn overgrown with ivy, standing at the corner of a green and shady lane.

"Picturesque beer-shop!" observed my companion; "would look pretty in a picture, with a Mary the Maid of the Inn sitting in pensive attitude under that little alcove of clematis, or scarlet-runners, which is it?"

"Clematis, I think."

"Now I look again, I am inclined to fancy it's hops; but all green things of the aspiring

order have such a strong family likeness, that a London bird like me gets puzzled with Nature's profusion. Those climbing plants put me in mind of some men of the world I have heard of."

"Do they?" I remarked, for the want of a better observation.

"They struggle desperately to rise, they twist their souls out to gain something to cling to, they will crawl like a snake on the ground till some mean thing, with its head in the air, can give them a lift, and then they will rise by its support, and perhaps ungratefully choke it for its assistance; will, at all events, look contemptuously down when there is no further need of its services. They will curl, and writhe, and bend, but they will rise very often to the top of the tree and flaunt themselves in the *empty air* which they have struggled so hard to attain."

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Suppose so, boy," he said, with a disparaging downward look at me; "I am not moralizing for your behoof, I was sneering at the hard workers of the world, in a Prince of

Denmark soliloquy, thinking what fools those men are who slave all their lives for a shadow, and fling into the waters of oblivion that substance which would have made them respectable and respected. And all this comes out of that porch of clematis, or hops, under which a damsel in a red cloak *should* be sitting, to give one spot of color to the landscape."

"Are you an artist, sir?"

"No—a tumbler."

"A tumbler!" I exclaimed, looking intently at the tall gentleman, and trying to imagine him in tight fleshings and spangles; "you have come from Nettleton, sir, I suppose?"

"What do you know of Nettleton?" he asked, sharply.

I remembered my own little secret.

"Nothing. There was a fair held there some days ago, I believe."

"Very likely; and all the grand people patronized it for the want of something better to do, I suppose; and Squire Heberdeen, his lady, and their interesting children perhaps opened the fair, in just such a manner as the

Queen of England opens Parliament House—eh?"

"Who is Squire Heberdeen?" I asked, in the most artful manner, although rather astonished to find a stranger, and a Londoner, so well acquainted with the Nettleton grandees.

"A great man over there," with a flourish of his hand in a vague direction; "at least, I daresay he is by this time. This is the Half-way-House, will it suit you?"

"I don't know—I'll ask."

I found the landlord—he *was* cadaverous—sitting behind the bar and going to sleep, in defiance of a thousand unseasonable flies, who were buzzing round his head and feasting on him. I found the accommodation reasonable, so reasonable that my doubts as to the pecuniary means of my late companion were considerably strengthened. I settled on a bed for the night, and then rejoined the stranger in the bar-parlor.

"Well—will it suit you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Glad to hear it, for I am rather fond of society and fresh faces, and I think it very

doubtful if 'parlor company' patronize the Half-way-House to any extent. Do you play chess?"

"A little."

"Ah! I don't care about chess with one who plays a little—slow work. Cards?"

"No."

"Strictly brought up, for a sixpence?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't wonder at your running away from home. Strict disciplinarians always draw the reins a *leetle* too tight, and then follow the eruption and the disruption. You put me in mind of my young days."

"Were you—"

He held up one finger.

"No matter. 'Those happy days are gone,' as the Sixpenny Vocalist observes, and I never look back at the past—it's not a first rate retrospect. I'm a tumbler, you know."

"I should not have thought it."

Short unpleasant laugh again.

"Not a Bounding Brother, or an India-rubber child of the Pyrenees, but a true

tumbler nevertheless — one who has been better off and less happy."

"Indeed."

"I am a philosopher. Do you know what that is?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I take everything coolly, and let nothing put me out or astonish me. I am contented with my position in society down a back street in Chelsea, and I have just money enough to live on if I am sparing of my cash and keep my eyes open."

"May I ask what trade you are?"

"Trade, youth!" with an elevation of his eyebrows and a curl of the lip, "I have a soul above taking penny pieces over a shop-counter — the Markinghams have been always above it, and Stephen, the last of that name, has a soul like his ancestors. Landlord, two glasses of mild ale, and not so many of the *diptera* species in the liquid this time."

When the mild ale was brought, and we sat facing each other at a shaky mahogany table, he said:—

"Many of my friends—that is, my acquaintances—say to me sometimes, 'why don't you turn your education to account?' but that would not be philosophy, but hard work. If I can live and be comfortable without exerting myself, why should I be somebody's slave—a schoolmaster's, a secretary's, a publisher's, in order to put more money in my pocket? If I wear seedy habiliments, I don't owe my tailor for them, and I would as soon live in my two-pair front, as in apartments in the Albany. I can go to the theatres, or take my pleasure in the country, *par exemple*, and richer people than I can only do it in more style, which is a thing I don't care for. As for saving money, that's impossible under the circumstances; and, as I have no one to leave a penny to, why, there would not be even method in my madness. But—ha! ha!—here am I discoursing on philosophy to a boy of fifteen who don't understand half I am talking about."

"Oh! yes, I do."

"Well, don't you admire my principles?"

"It's nice and lazy."

"You are a sharp lad," he said, regarding me attentively, "and not a particularly civil one. Still it's a candid opinion, and I admire a man—and a boy too—who can speak out. Drink your ale; it's not too good when it's fresh drawn, and it's second-rate ditch-water if it be allowed to stand a moment."

"Your health, sir!"

"That's vulgar, but thank you all the same. Do you smoke?"

"No, sir."

He drew a small meerschaum pipe from his pocket, and proceeded to fill it with tobacco. The sun had sunk by this time, and the landscape, through the ivy-framed window, was getting grey and dusky.

"'What trade do you mean to follow?' as old Fletcher says."

"I don't know."

"You are going to London in search of a place?"

"Yes; do you know Woodleigh's, in Edgeware Road?"

"Have you a berth there?"

"I hope to obtain one."

"'Hope told a flattering tale,' therefore Hope, in plain language, was a story-teller—the baggage!"

"Which would be my nearest way to the Edgeware Road?"

"Time enough to ask that when you are nearer London. I travel your road to-morrow, and if you be not in a hurry, why, we may journey together."

"I must be in London by Friday night, if possible."

"Well, you can do as you like—I shan't walk seventeen miles a-day myself. Landlord, when are you going to light up? This twilight is a terrible thing for the spirits."

The landlord of the Half-way-House entered and lighted the gas, and Mr. Markingham enquired of him if he expected any company that evening?

"There generally *is* some one," replied the landlord; but he went out of the room with a doubtful expression of countenance.

However, just as Mr. Markingham was refilling his pipe for the fourth time, company

did arrive in the shape of a master-butcher in the vicinity.

The master butcher was followed by the clerk of the parish, the clerk by a small farmer, and the farmer by a young man with a very red face, who had been at cricket all day, and nearly killed himself with exertion. Beer and spirits were speedily in request; Mr. Markingham had a glass of cold brandy-and-water, and I ordered on my own account a half-pint of ale—not that I wanted it, but I feared the host of the Half-way-House might think me shabby.

I sat by the table almost unheeded, dozing over my 'mild sixpenny' and straining my bundle to my breast. The butcher, the clerk, the farmer, the cricketer and my new acquaintance were all soon with pipes in their mouths, and the room was filling with smoke and becoming a queer atmosphere to exist in. The smoke presently made me cough, and coughing woke me up for good. It was a dull, comfortless evening; the society was mixed and not of my class, I did not comprehend the subjects of discourse, I did not

care for them. I could not help observing that my friend of the afternoon had a great deal to say on every topic that was started, and to say it, too, in a light, easy manner which betokened a man well up in his subject. He seemed to know a great deal about everything; he talked of plays and play-actors, politics, last Ascot Races, foreign parts, fly-fishing, and religion. His ideas on the last point were so startling that he frightened the parlor customers and made my hair stand on end; he disputed with the parish clerk—who was a well-read man in the Lessons of the day, as became his position,—and the parish clerk got out of temper, and wished he had the parson there to back him, "He would be the gentleman's match, he'd wager a glass of brandy-and-water round on it!"

I thought, if my stern devout step-father had been there, how he would have turned up his eyes at the sceptic and scoffer, how he would have preached at him, and banged the table with his fist, and knocked the beer-mugs over! If that step-father could have seen me then, at that hour, in that

place, he would have given me up as wholly lost.

When I was within an inch of suffocation from tobacco-smoke, I went out of the room with my bundle under my arm. I took up my position by the horse-trough and under the creaking sign, and looked at the great white moon shining through the trees across the road. It was a pretty country spot, and reminded me so of Nettleton that it made my heart sink. So sweet and still the landscape before me in the moonlight, and yet in some mysterious way so depressing to the feelings! I stood and wondered what they were all doing in the far-away old town I had quitted —what my mother and Mr. Bowden were doing—what mischief Tom Arrow was after —Tom, my old comrade, the boy friend whom I might never see again!

"Moonstruck, my lad?"

I started. Mr. Markingham was at my side; those clear grey eyes of his were looking at me—through me.

"Not quite moonstruck yet, sir."

"Tired of the parlor company?"

"Rather."

"*Et moi aussi.* An ignorant lot, but then," with a shrug of his shoulders, "what can be expected in this place? Let us stroll to the river side again, and see how the moon touches up the beautiful. Such a night as this is worth the whole of my fortnight's ramble from the London smoke and bustle. Are you coming?"

"No, thank you; I am tired. I shall go straight to bed now."

"Good night then. Here goes for a stroll in true poet fashion. If you should not hear of me to-morrow morning, be kind enough to have the river dragged, my man."

CHAPTER II.

TO LONDON ☞

Mr. Markingham was downstairs before me the next morning.

"Ah! good morning to you," he said, looking up from his early breakfast as I entered the bar-parlor—"I shall have the start of you to-day."

"I shall overtake you, sir."

"Very likely. Do you intend that seventeen miles' walk to-day?"

"I must be in London by Friday night."

"In order to begin business the first thing on Saturday morning?"

"If I get the chance."

"Ah! I fear you will not find London so full of vacancies as you fancy. There are plenty of people out of work in that quarter —plenty of people stronger, more clever, more experienced than the young gentleman whom I have the honor to address. If you will take my advice, you will turn tail and back to your mother."

"No, sir," said I, sternly; "better beg in the streets than go back like a coward."

"Well, I don't know your story, so my advice is uncalled for. Still you are very young; have you anywhere to go?"

"No."

"And you are not sure of a place at this Woodleigh's?"

"Far from sure."

"And you know nothing of London?"

"Nothing."

"Then I admire your spirit, and I only hope it may not fail you. You must have had hard provocation to have started on this wild-goose errand."

I did not answer. Now my anger had abated, the provocation seemed but a small

one, and the step I had taken more unjustifiable than ever. However, I did not tell the inquisitive stranger so, although he was evidently a kind man, for all his satirical remarks on persons and things.

Mr. Markingham strolled from the Inn shortly afterwards, and when I had had my own frugal breakfast—two biscuits and some more of that exceedingly mild ale—I stepped out in good style and overtook him about a mile from the Half-way-House. We journeyed together the rest of the morning, Mr. Markingham condescending to suit his rate of progression to my own. I had awakened an interest in him, and he did not care to disguise it. "I reminded him of his young days," he had said last night, and that remembrance soon made him something more than an acquaintance one meets by the roadside. He talked of London and my prospects, gave me much valuable advice as to my future course, warned me not to be too sanguine of success in town, or too eager to make new friends there. Once or twice my story was on the tip of my tongue, but I refrained, although

my boy's heart was full, and there was something in the manner of the traveller that encouraged confidence. I resolved to put off my confession till the afternoon, but before the afternoon came, Mr. Markingham acknowledged himself beaten, and declined to proceed further at so headlong a pace.

"I'm not a youth with his veins full of life and his heart full of energy," he said; "forty years of age, backed by a weak constitution, cannot stride along in seven-league boots and feel never the worse for it. Go your way, young man, and if my wishes for good luck are worth anything, take them and be happy! Think over my advice as you go along."

"I will, sir."

"Perhaps I shall meet you to-morrow, homeward bound."

"Not yet awhile, Mr. Markingham," said I, setting off again.

When I looked back, he was lounging on a grassy bank, the very picture of indolence. He waved a shabby kid glove towards me as a sign of farewell, till a bend of the road hid the "philosopher" from view.

I was sorry I had parted from him—he was an easy good-tempered being,—if Mr. Bowden had been only like him, I should not have run away from Nettleton.

I walked on at a rapid pace; I had resolved to do seventeen miles that day, and I completed my task by five o'clock in the afternoon.

I passed through Windsor without looking right or left, and halted at a quiet-looking village a few miles further on. Presently, to my astonishment, Mr. Markingham appeared in sight, leaning against a milestone and smoking his pocket meerschaum.

"Well done, young wanderer," he exclaimed, "what a thing it is to be young—heigho!"

"How did you get here, sir?"

"By railway—I thought I should save shoe-leather and a deal of unnecessary exertion if I rode a few miles by way of change. I have been here these two hours, and have spent the time in exploring. I have discovered another quiet inn, where the terms are moderate, and the beer better than at the last establishment."

"I feel inclined to walk on," said I.

"Your seventeen miles are completed," observed he, tapping the mile-stone against which he was leaning, "and a very fair day's work you have got through. Come with me, and I'll show you the Inn."

I did not proceed further that night; I spent the evening with Mr. Markingham, not in the parlor in the midst of company and tobacco-smoke, but on the moonlit banks of the Thames. I told him my story that night, not mentioning names or places, and he listened very attentively, and when I had brought my narrative to an end, indulged in a low long whistle which reminded me of Tom Arrow.

"Anger and heedlessness are bad qualities to begin the world with, youngster," said he; "if you don't keep them in the background, they will extinguish all hope and leave you for ever in the dark. Rash lad, to leave home, a good mother—ay, and a good second father too—for the unknown and untried. I thought your wrongs were far greater, had no idea you were so small a fury. Well, your

mother will be all the happier when the first trouble is over."

"I daresay she will," I answered sullenly.

I had expected some sympathy from him, and his remark nettled me. His humor seemed to change, and he was certainly not the agreeable man that I had hitherto found him. On the previous evening I had observed an undercurrent of sarcasm running through several parts of his discourse—but I was not prepared for a severe criticism on my conduct, for a series of remarks that were bitter, jesting, and contemptuous. He appeared to delight in his own observations, too; his grey eyes brightened, his cheeks flushed, it was his element in which he was disporting, and he splashed, and dived, and sprinkled me with polite abuse all the way home to the Inn.

At the door he stopped, and laid a thin white hand—a hand like a delicate woman's—on my arm.

"You appear surprised and affronted," he remarked; "but you cannot expect to jostle through life and not meet with hard-hearted

people. You will stare when you hear I have been jesting all this while."

"Jesting!"

"Playing a part, to see how you could bear it."

"What part?"

"That of the world, which you will find rougher and more unfeeling than I," said he; "and, truly speaking, you have borne it very well for a youth who is partial to flinging about chimney-ornaments, and knocking people's teeth out. You may get on, although you ought to come to grief, if it's only for the sake of a warning to hot-headed boys like you. There, I have ended my satire now. I was not in my Diogenes vein, or I might have done it better. Come in."

The next morning we started together again, and before the morning was ended, Mr. Markingham once more acknowledged himself beaten, and declined to proceed at my rate of progression.

"I shall go the rest of the way by train—cut across the fields here to the railway-station—will you join me?"

I shook my head. I was almost penniless, and every halfpenny in my pocket was precious at that time.

"It will save some hours," he said.

"No, sir—I must walk."

He took a few shillings from his purse, and began counting them over.

"Let me see, to-day's Friday—say four shillings—Saturday, a fresh supply, and a fair start again. Yes, I can do it. Come on."

"Not that way, thank you."

"I have a ticket for you—the gentleman who drives the engine is a particular friend of mine, and has put me on the free list."

I saw through his ruse, and shook my head.

"Very well," said he; "ease and independence for ever. Perhaps you are in the right to begin the world 'free of all demands,' as the receipts say. Good bye."

He extended his hand towards me, and shook mine heartily.

"When do you go after this situation?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Will you call to-morrow evening on me—No. 2, Barker-street, Chelsea—and let me know the result?"

"If my—if I obtain a situation at Woodleigh's, I think I will, sir, thank you."

"But if you fail, I may suggest something."

"If I fail, sir, I would rather be alone in the world for a little while."

"Will you store my address in your memory? I have no card to offer you—I don't see the philosophy of pasteboard."

"I shall remember your address."

"Then good bye."

He stopped again.

"One more piece of advice: write home to your mother when you reach London; it will not take a great deal of time, or be a very expensive proceeding. Good day to you."

"Good day, sir."

He raised his hat and saluted me in an easy and gentlemanly manner, that somehow told of the better days, and I imitated his example by removing my cap. Thus we

parted, and I walked the rest of the way to London alone.

I reached town in safety—reached it when the streets were full of people, when the lights were in the shop windows, and cabs, carts, and omnibuses were rattling noisily about the streets.

It had a bewildering effect on me that first five minutes of my entry into London, it was so great a contrast to Nettleton—there were so many people, I felt so much alone, so undecided whither to go now the haven was reached, and I stood at my journey's end. However, I settled down at last; there were plenty of places where a cheap bed could be procured, and a friendly policeman kindly pointed out a respectable lodging-house.

I wrote a letter to my mother that night assuring her I was well, in London, and quite safe—that I should write again soon and tell her all the news, all my resolutions! I added that I should get on in the world now I had no one to please but myself, and perhaps it was better for everybody that I had run away from Nettleton. After a stroll in the streets

again in search of a post-office and a light supper, I returned to my cheap bed, and fell asleep, to dream of the morning that was coming, and of the day that had passed.

CHAPTER III.

RELATIONS.

THE next morning I equipped myself in my 'Sunday best,' and consigned my week-day suit to the depths of my bundle. It was striking ten when I was in the streets again and had obtained information concerning the nearest way to Edgeware Road from another respectable and well-informed policeman.

Bundle in hand, a waif on the turbulent ocean, I hurried on my mission, fearing the worst, yet hoping for the best. I found London as bewildering as yesternight. The world was hurrying by me, and the constant stream of people made me dizzy. I had been

so used to Nettleton and to the 'still life' in its precincts, had seen in my younger days so little of the turmoil of the busy city, that the nature of the scene in which I moved could scarce be realized, and had I suddenly found myself in my little bed at Nettleton, a waker up from troubled dreams, I should not have been very much surprised.

But it was no dream; the myriad faces passing by,—strange inflexible faces, faces absorbed, faces of care, and faces full of eagerness—were too strongly marked with life to have their rise in visions.

Are all these people struggling, scheming for subsistence? I thought; is each man who passes bent upon some errand that shall put money in his pocket? and, in the midst of so great a world of workers, is there room for one so young, so rash, so ignorant?

Glancing at the crowd in which I mingled, I thought how hard it would be to find a helping hand within it, and how easy to be lost in its midst, and never heard of more!

There were starving women on the door-steps, clasping infants to their breasts, and

the world went by and cared not—there were men to whom that world was darkness, groping along and crying 'Blind,' and other men too wide-awake to heed them, jostling them aside and angry with the sightless beggars in the way; there were rich men, Pharisees with gold chains and diamond pins, scouting the weak and helpless, forgetful of the story of old Lazarus; and I felt that to succeed amid the selfish crowd, one must be hard, and stern, and selfish too.

My heart sunk still more as I neared Edgeware Road, and when I stood before two great gates on which were written, "WOODLEIGH, RAILWAY CARRIER, CONTRACTOR, &c., I had to lean against a post to collect my courage. Upon the next quarter of an hour depended my whole after-career, perhaps,—my success in life, or ruin!

Beyond the gates, which were open, stretched an extensive yard, and at its extremity were offices, warehouses, and stables. There was considerable bustle in the distance; rough, gigantic men were laboring at heavy burdens, a van was being piled with luggage,

and horses and carmen were moving to and fro.

"What room is there yonder for a boy like me," I soliloquized, in true Hamlet fashion. "It's all up, there's no chance for me! I had better turn away and seek some other situation. I am only a child—not fifteen years of age till next month—what a fool I was to run away from home!"

Then I thought of Mr. Bowden, of my uncle, of the fly-leaf in that family Bible I had left behind, of my unknown cousins, of the far away time when my father was my uncle's partner, when father and uncle were both poor brothers, striving with an energy that made the latter's fortune, but destroyed my father's health and killed him.

"Well, it's no good standing here, Robert Woodleigh," I muttered to myself, a la Hamlet again; "the Railway Carrier, Contractor, &c., is a near relation, and there's nothing you have to be ashamed of before him. You were never particularly bashful—people in Nettleton called you a bold young rascal—a black sheep! They can't eat you in the yard,

and you can't be worse off than you are now, if the worst comes to the worst. So make up your mind at once, Bob, and then—quick march!"

It was a struggle to nerve myself to the task, but I succeeded. I set my teeth together, pulled my cap tighter over my brows, tucked my bundle more firmly under my right arm, and buttoned my jacket with my left hand.

"Here goes. One, two, three, and — away!"

I would not think any more on the subject. I made a dash across the road, rushed along the yard, turned the corner to the right, stood a moment, casting a hurried glance round me, caught sight of a door on which was written "Office," darted towards it, pushed it open, fell over the step, dropped my bundle, and went plunging into the sanctum sanctorum, almost head foremost.

"Hollo, here!" cried a young man, perched on a high office-stool before a desk near the window; "what game's this? Make a little less noise, will you?"

When I had recovered myself and picked up my bundle, I glanced at the young man on the stool. He was the only occupant of the office, and there was certainly no blood of the Woodleighs in *his* veins. It was possible that seven years and upwards would make a difference in the personal appearance of my cousins, but the young man on the stool was not a Woodleigh for all that, and I was very sorry for it.

"Now, then, what's your business?" asked the young man, sharply.

I glanced at him again. He was not a pleasant young man to look at; he was a red-faced, pimply being, of about twenty years of age, and he had a defect in his vision which ill-natured people would have termed a squint. There was an official appearance about him which impressed me though, as he sat perched on the high stool, the cuffs of his green plaid coat turned up in a business-like manner, a ruler in one hand, a pen in the other, and a quill pen, which had been dipped in red ink, behind his ear.

"I wish to see Mr. Woodleigh."

"Mr. Woodleigh's not in."

"What time will he be in, sir?"

"I don't know," said the clerk, twisting round on his stool, and squinting at me frightfully. "What is it you want with him? Can't I do as well? I'm Mr. Woodleigh's private secretary."

"Oh! are you?" I replied, thinking Mr. Woodleigh might have selected a better specimen at any rate.

"Have you brought a message?"

"No, sir."

His looks fell in an oblique manner on my bundle.

"Oh! I see—you've got something to sell. Come, that won't do here, you know."

"I wish to see Mr. Woodleigh."

"Mr. Woodleigh's gone to Bath in search of a fashionable hairdresser, and will not be back till Saturday three weeks."

And with this appalling announcement he twisted himself into his former position, and resumed the occupation from which my sudden appearance had diverted him. I stood and watched the back of the office coat, the move-

ment of the right arm, and the legerdemain manner in which he occasionally changed the pen with the black ink for the pen with the red.

"Can you give me Mr. Woodleigh's address, please?" I said, after a long silence.

"What! haven't you gone yet?" he cried, looking round once more; "well, this is pretty cool, I must say. Now, have you come on any business that requires *my* attention?"

"No."

"And you haven't brought a message?"

"No."

"Has anybody sent you here?"

"No."

"Then just be off!"

He sprang off the office stool, ran to the door, opened it wide, and pointed to the yard.

"That's your way, and if you won't go quietly, I shall make you."

I looked at this very officious gentleman. He was a thin young man, and rather weak

in the knees; there would certainly be some difficulty in forcing my retirement, though he was full five years my senior.

"I will go when you give me Mr. Woodleigh's address; if you try to *make* me before, you will have some trouble, and perhaps get hurt."

I laid my bundle on a vacant chair and doubled my fists in a menacing manner.

The private secretary put his head out of the office doorway, and looked up and down the yard. The van had gone, and there was not a man in sight to help him.

"Why didn't you say you wanted the address before?" said he, "instead of bothering me with your nonsense. Wait a moment, and I'll get it you. Don't be frightened—I'm not going to touch you!"

"I'm not frightened in the least, thank you," I replied, as he passed me, went back to his desk, and wrote something on a slip of paper which he afterwards extended to me. I advanced and took the address.

"Is this quite right?"

"Of course it is."

"Grove House, Tottenham—where's Tottenham?"

"Anybody will tell you. You must work your way to Shoreditch, and then—"

He did not complete his sentence, for with a sudden spring he bounded on to the high stool, turned his back upon me, and recommenced writing in a vigorous manner. I was at a loss to account for this acrobatic feat, till a sharp clear voice outside suggested the reason.

"There will be a van from the Great-Western in five minutes, John—where have all the men got to?—where's Bowler—where's Simmons?—this is always the way when Mr. Woodleigh's or my back's turned a minute—here, Jones, just run with this to the stores—who's up in the warehouse?—now, look alive there with the horses!"

The door was pushed open, and a youth of sixteen or seventeen years' of age walked briskly into the office. A youth not very tall for his age, but a sturdy, well-proportioned youth, with a good-looking freckled face.

"Here, Watkinson, make an entry of this,

will you?" he said, bustling to the desk and placing a paper on it.

"Yes, sir."

"As quick as you can, because it will be called for. Has Mr. Woodleigh come back?"

"No, Mr. Upton."

"Anybody been?"

"No, sir—that is, only this fellow," pointing in my direction with the feather of his pen; "he won't go away. He has not been sent here on business, and he has not brought a message. I think he has got something to sell in that bundle."

Upton Woodleigh wheeled round, and our eyes met. The children of two brothers looked each other in the face, but my blood relation's countenance expressed no sign of recognition. However, it was a frank open countenance that prepossessed me in my cousin's favor, and there was such a Woodleigh look about the eyes that I could not fancy him a stranger. But eight years had passed since I had seen him last—he was then a curly-haired little boy of nine years old, and wore a Scotch dress and a velvet plaid cap; and now he was

quite a sharp man of business, and looked nearer twenty years of age than seventeen.

"What is your business, my man? If it's anything to sell, we don't want to buy it, and we haven't got time to look at it."

"I did wish to see your father, but I understand he is at Bath."

"Bath!" repeated my cousin, with a slight laugh; "he has got there pretty quick then. He was here half an hour ago."

I looked at the mendacious clerk, who, after a scowl of warning, bent himself into the letter S over the account-books.

"Will it be long before he returns?"

"It's uncertain," was the reply; "why don't you state your business? It can't be so very important."

"I'll tell you if you will step into the yard a moment. Perhaps you will not care to hear who I am before your private secretary."

He looked at Watkinson, muttered 'private secretary indeed,' and walked into the yard. I took my bundle from the chair and followed him.

"Now then," he said, when the office door

was closed behind him; "sharp's the word, young fellow. Who are you?"

"Robert Woodleigh."

"Rob— Robert Woodleigh!" exclaimed my cousin; "you don't mean that!"

"No credit to Upton Woodleigh as a relation perhaps," I said, with a glance at my Sunday habiliments.

"My cousin Robert," said he, with his keen bright eyes surveying me; "well, that's a startler at all events. How are you?"

He extended his hand towards me, and when mine was placed within it, he gave it a cordial shake.

"Whoever would have thought of seeing you here to-day? By Jove, this is a surprise! I say, cousin, you have altered considerably since you and I played at marbles in the little back-yard in Queen Street. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, well."

"Remember brother Dick, too? He's being brought up to the Church."

"And you?"

"I have begun the world early, you see.

I prefer my father's business to racketing about college; Dick likes college, likes the fun there too, but I can't exactly fancy Dick in the pulpit, and I don't believe he fancies it himself. How is Aunt Woodleigh? I ought to have asked about her before."

"She is very well, thank you. Are your sisters well — and little Johnny, whom I left a baby?"

"Oh, they are all right. And—here's the governor!"

The governor, Uncle Woodleigh, a short, thin man, with a sallow countenance and great grey whiskers, came at a rapid pace through the gateway, with a dozen papers fluttering in his hands. As he advanced, he looked sharply from me to his son, then to me again.

"What is the matter?—who's this?" he said, with a rapidity of utterance that was difficult to follow—"any message been sent from Wixon's, or is he waiting for an answer from Tolboy's? Tolboy's answer went by post, and everything will be attended to—where's Watkinson?"

"In the office."

"Has not the van come yet?—and—and what did you say this lad wanted?"

"Wants to see you, Mr. Woodleigh," said Upton with a smile—"it's a relation of ours."

"A relation—why, who?—where does he come from?—what's his name?—it's not—surely it is, though"—looking at me intently—"the devil take me if it is not Robert's boy! Bless my soul and body, what has brought you to London?—is anything wrong?—is your mother ill or dead, or anything of that sort?"

"No, uncle. I have come to London to earn my own living. My step-father and I could not agree together—and the truth is, I ran away from home, and here I am."

"Is your mother married again?"

"Yes."

"I never heard of it," said my uncle, looking as offended as if he had been my mother's most intimate friend since her husband's death—"it's very odd I was not told of it—very disrespectful—might have written

me a line at least. And so they treated you badly?"

"I don't know that my step-father treated me badly," I replied. "He was a strict man and did not understand me. I thought it would be better to come to London. I thought, too, that for the sake of relationship you might find a place—I don't care what sort of place it is—for the son of your old partner."

"Dear, dear me, this is very singular—old partner, nephew, run away from home and come to me for work. Robert's boy, too, —why, how old are you?"

"Fifteen next month."

"You are not fit for out-door work, driving a van, or anything of that sort; I'm afraid there's nothing for you to do here, my boy. We're quite full at present, and the business would never suit you. I think you had better go home again and—what's that for?"

I had shaken my head at his suggestion, and my action of dissent had caught his eye.

"I shall not go home, Uncle Woodleigh. I have not walked sixty miles to return by the same road. I have come to London to earn my own living, and if you cannot put me in the way of it, why, I must find it in the streets."

I was turning to go away when he cried—

"Don't be so hasty—bless my soul, he's my brother Robert all over, just like him, not an atom of prudence. What can you do—read, write,—any hand at figures?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Might do in the office, eh, Upton—what do you think—might *try* him for a week?"

"Oh yes; and there's room for him in the office, too, if it's only to look after Watkinson. We can't send him away, you know," was the reply.

"You have no objection to make yourself generally useful?" asked my uncle.

"I'm not afraid of work."

"Your father was not," said my uncle; "and I hope you take after him. I don't know what I can make of you yet—don't know whether you are even worth your salt.

However, I'll try you for a week; you can come next Monday at six o'clock."

Upton said something to his father in a low voice.

"No, decidedly not," replied my uncle, dropping his voice also; "not to be thought of for an instant. There's no one at home to amuse him, and it's a bad practice to begin with—a too familiar proceeding by half. We know nothing of him yet; he's a boy without a character, one who has run away from home, and we don't know what for. Bless my soul, it's rather imprudent, now I come to think of it!"

To describe the railway rate at which this speech was delivered is beyond my power; the words absolutely rolled over one another, and into one another, in their eagerness to come forth. Fortunately, he was a long-winded man, and had not the slightest impediment in his speech, or he would have died of suffocation years ago.

He turned to me.

"You had better tell your mother where you are, I think, and what you are going

to do. Whom has your mother married?"

"A Methodist preacher—Mr. Bowden."

"Bowden, eh?" said he; "*Bowden*, did you say?"

"Yes, Bowden."

"That's singular, Upton," he remarked; "but still it is not an uncommon name. Methodist, you say; a good man, I have no doubt. What made you run away from him?"

Briefly as possible I related the particulars of the dispute with my step-father, and its result. My uncle had hardly patience to listen; he was a restless excitable man, and fidgeted extremely during the recital of my story. He looked at his watch, at his papers, at a van lumbering into the yard, he interrupted me twice by shouting some orders to the carman, he beat a tattoo with both feet, he rubbed his hands one over the other, he took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Yes, yes, yes," he said, when I had arrived at a conclusion; "I understand—you

were quite right, or very wrong, there's not the slightest doubt. Well, come on Monday; we are very busy just now, you see, Robert, and—Hi there! I want you."

Mr. Woodleigh took to his heels, and an instant afterwards was in the midst of his men, darting hither and thither, gesticulating violently, shouting out orders, and altogether in a state of frenzy.

"The governor is quite the man of business, is he not, Robert? and as quick as ever in making up his mind to anything," said Upton. "Do you see much difference in him?"

"I should have known him anywhere."

"He's a trifle more energetic, and perhaps more irritable, but then business has increased the last two years, and brought many cares and responsibilities. I wanted my father to increase his staff six months ago, but he would not listen to my proposition."

"Have you been long in the business?"

"A year. My father took me away from boarding-school early; he did not think a young railway-carrier required many accom-

plishments at his finger ends. Reading, writing, and arithmetic, I was well up in, and that was enough for him, and—for me, too."

"I suppose it will be Woodleigh and Son soon?"

"Some day," said he, with a laugh. "When I am twenty-one, and the Son is inscribed on those gates, perhaps I shall get the men to mind me more. They are a set of obstinate rascals at present, and think I am too young to give orders to them, or keep a sharp eye on the Woodleigh interests. But," with a light shake of the head, "they're wrong there."

"I fear I am detaining you, Upton."

"Well, we are rather busy, Robert. When a van comes in, it's like stirring up a beehive—makes a general confusion, and keeps everybody's eyes open. You will not forget to come on Monday."

"No. And as I have not thanked you yet—"

"Oh, never mind your thanks," he interrupted; "it would have been hard not to have helped a relation; the son of an old

partner, too, as you observed to the governor. Why, do you know, Robert, that you are the only cousin we have in the world?"

"You had all nearly forgotten him, I dare-say."

"No, we had not," was the quick reply; "for although the London Woodleighs were drifting a different way from the country ones, yet we had a habit of saying now and then, 'I wonder where Aunt Woodleigh is?' or 'I wonder if we shall ever see cousin Robert again?'"

"You did not expect to see me in this plight, Upton?"

"Why, no. We all fancied your mother had married a rich man, gone abroad, and taken you with her."

"It is easier to fancy than to make enquiry."

"Eh?" said Upton, looking at me with some surprise. "Oh! yes, you are right enough—it *is* easier. Friends and relations who are fifty miles apart fall into an apathetic way concerning each other's pursuits, and as time goes on, so the apathy increases, I am ashamed to say."

"Especially when one branch of the family is going up-hill, and the other down."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so," answered Upton, in his father's hurried manner; "that always makes a difference, and always will—it is one of those facts that can't be helped, Robert Woodleigh, grumble as we may."

I felt the reproof conveyed in his reply.

"And it is not my place to grumble—I, who have just received a proof of my relative's kindness—is it? But I will not detain you, cousin; good day."

"Wait a moment. It's—it's," putting his hand in his pocket, "customary here to pay the first week's salary in advance, if required, and we know the party. Have you any objection to receive it, Robert?"

"It's always customary?" I repeated in a doubtful manner.

"Yes—of course it is—did you not know it?" he replied. "Your salary will not be large to begin with, Robert—not more than ten or twelve shillings a-week,—and here's a half-sovereign, will that do?"

I took the welcome coin with a faint

"thank you." Although I had only sixpence and a few coppers in my pocket, it made my cheeks flush and my chest heave to receive money for which I had not worked. It was like bestowing alms upon me, for he could see how poor I was! As my fingers closed upon the piece of gold, I felt what a difference there was between the giver and receiver—the rich man's son and the poor wanderer. One would be master, and the other, whose father was once a partner in the firm, would be a servant and a slave.

I went away discontented, although the object of my mission was accomplished, and the means of living in London afforded me; I felt that I was unjust, selfish, envious, and that the demon of discontent was at my side prompting me to thoughts ungenerous.

Those thoughts I did not seek to stifle as I walked on; I let them prey upon me. I began to consider myself aggrieved that I had not been asked to dinner at Grove House, Tottenham—that I had not been considered by my relations good enough for their society, now that they had risen in the world, and were

making money. I was only fit to be their office-boy, to run on errands, perhaps—" to make myself," as uncle Woodleigh had observed, " generally useful." And yet I was of the same race; my father would have been as grand as any of them had he lived to reap the profits of that business which he had helped to form, and I should have been a young master there, like cousin Upton, or a college student, like cousin Dick.

" Never mind, there's a way to make for myself," a better genius whispered at last, " and success will be sweetened by my own exertions." Weak is the mind and feeble the hand of the pilgrim who gives way in the outset of life, with youth in its spring, and the world's prizes before him!

CHAPTER IV.

I FINISH THE DAY.

I DID not immediately set forth in search of No. 2, Barker Street, Chelsea, after obtaining employment at the Railway Carrier's of the name of Woodleigh. I indulged in a cheap dinner at an eating-house, where the quantity of meat for sixpence was of greater consideration than the quality, and then sauntered into Hyde Park, and spent the afternoon in reflections of a varied order, after the manner mentioned in my last chapter.

It was nearly five o'clock when I was in

the neighbourhood of Chelsea, looking for Barker Street. I had resolved to go to Mr. Markingham's and tell him of my good fortune, feeling sure that he would be glad to hear my story.

It was singular that I should look forward to a meeting with Mr. Markingham as to an interview with an old friend, forgetting that he was almost a stranger to me, and one of whose pursuits I knew nothing. Still, he had been kind to me, and though there were many traits in his character that I did not admire, yet there was still an attraction that drew me towards him.

Are there not some men in the world with whom we are friends at first sight, and others of whom a life-long knowledge gains not an inch of our hearts?

Mr. Markingham was one of the former; he had shown an interest in me, and flattered me into liking him, and yet was he not a dangerous man to be acquainted with?—a man who saw philosophy in indolence and selfishness, and had peculiar ideas on matters of religion. I had a vague notion that I was

rather too anxious to continue the acquaintance of Mr. Markingham, when I had the knocker of No. 2, Barker Street, in my hand.

"Is Mr. Markingham within?" I inquired of a middle-aged woman who responded to my summons.

"Two-pair front," was the short reply.

Leaving me to find the way for myself, the woman shut the door and went into the parlor. I ascended the stairs, which I found quite a striking feature of the house and full of variety, the preliminary flight being neatly carpeted, the second—starting from the first-floor—a shabby oil-cloth, worn into holes in many places, and the third—leading to upper regions which I did not penetrate—destitute of any covering whatever, and presenting a bare, unwashed appearance to the eye of an observer.

I stood before Mr. Markingham's door, and announced my presence outside by a tap on the panels.

"Come in," answered the voice from the interior.

I entered.

It was a room of moderate size, and furnished without any pretensions to elegance. Before the windows were two dusty Venetian blinds, one of which had been drawn up to the top, and the other left *in statu quo*. There was a small round table in the centre of the room, a bookcase in one corner, and a sofa near the fireplace—a sofa that I had no doubt did duty as a bedstead later in the evening. Moreover, there was a piano—such an extraordinary piano; it took up one side of the room and intrenched upon the door (which it kept from opening to the fullest extent), and had about a dozen slim spider-like legs, some of which had given way in earlier times and been put up again slantwise. There was a small row of keys in the centre of the instrument, and there was a mahogany flap to cover them, that had lost two hinges out of three.

Mr. Markingham was stretched full length on the sofa, solacing himself as usual with his meerschaum pipe. His figure was wrapped in a faded dressing-gown of some mysterious

texture, which looked like old green baize, but wasn't.

"I expected you," said he.

"Did you, sir?"

"I thought you would change your mind about not calling if—but you have never got the place!"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Take a seat," said he, "and give me time to recover my surprise. Is it possible so hare-brained an errand has ended so profitably, and that a situation was waiting for you at your journey's end? Why, there's destiny in it, or you possess some grand secret of success for which hundreds of starvlings would be thankful."

"The secret is, sir, that Mr. Woodleigh is my uncle."

"Oh! I see," he said; "that makes a vast difference, albeit uncles are not always so ready in offering the helping hand to their nephews. You have grand relations then,—wholesalers, belonging to the aristocracy of trade—fortunate lad, when are you going to dine with them?"

"I don't know."

"May I ask what salary you will receive?" said he; "if it be a delicate point, pray don't satisfy my curiosity."

"Twelve shillings a-week."

"A fair start for a youth fresh from the buttercups and daisies," he observed; "and where have you pitched your tent in this wilderness of bricks and mortar?"

"Nowhere, at present; I thought you might know of a room that would suit me."

"You do not require apartments on a very grand scale, I presume?" he said; "not particular concerning the quality of the plate, or the fineness of the table-linen?"

"Not more particular than yourself," I answered, shortly.

"For a moment his face flushed as though I had pained him, but he gave his short hard laugh and said:

"That's right, young man; copy me, and sink living for appearances—one little struggle, and then a man is comfortable for ever afterwards. How do you like Barker Street?"

"It is quiet."

"Not a great distance from Edgeware Road, and a pleasant walk to business across the Park. Try it."

"Where can I get a bedroom?"

"My respected, amiable, and accomplished landlady has for disposal—has had for disposal the last six months, unfortunately—a small back bedroom at the top of the house, the window commanding a fine view of several acres of tiles. I have no doubt that room is at your service, and that a half-crown a-week, perhaps less, will satisfy the cormorant in the mob-cap,—I mean the amiable female before alluded to."

"That would suit me."

"And when you are inclined for society, you can come downstairs of an evening and knock at the door of this room, and if Stephen Markingham be within and in an amiable humor—for that is not always the case, even with philosophers—you will be admitted, and taught chess, or cribbage, or economy, or philosophy, or," waving his hand majestically towards the piano—"music on Marking-

ham's Grand! Will you be kind enough to ring the bell?"

I touched a bell-handle by the fireplace, but the summons was not responded to.

"My easy temper," said Mr. Markingham, after laying his pipe aside and indulging in a formidable yawn, "gets imposed on here. I have no doubt the landlady is observing to herself at this very moment:—'It's only Mr. M's bell—*he* can wait.' Be kind enough to keep on ringing!"

I complied with his request, and in a very short space of time the middle-aged landlady who had admitted me into the house made her appearance, looking very red in the face with suppressed indignation.

"Tea for two, Mrs. Bants," said the philosopher; "and—one moment, if you please—this young friend of mine is desirous of engaging the third-floor back on reasonable terms. Mrs. Bants, allow me to introduce to you—Mr. Hastyboy!"

I laughed, and Mrs. Bants, whose looks of indignation had vanished like a dream, regarded me in a motherly manner. Business

was soon concluded between us; the third-floor back was engaged for two shillings a-week, and my bundle was taken formally into my apartments. I had tea with Mr. Markingham, after a few objections on my part, which he quickly overruled by promising to have tea with me some day in return.

"This sort of amusement," said he to me, as he poured out my fifth cup, "tells us, the lords of creation, what helpless mortals we are in domestic matters, and how the fair sex are not to be despised, after all. Bachelorship certainly has its disadvantages."

"I wonder you don't marry, then, sir."

"My time is past. Forty years of single blessedness have moulded my character and adamantized my resolutions. Besides, I am a poor man, and a wife is an expensive luxury. It's like cream with your tea; you can't have it without paying for it, and even then you may get a sour and indifferent specimen for your money. Another cup?"

"No, thank you."

"Where do you think of going to-night?"

"Really, I don't know, sir."

"You are not engaged?"

"Oh, no."

"Then let us stroll westward, and see what we can find to finish the day with, Mr. —Woodleigh, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, friend Woodleigh, if you will wait till I have changed my dressing-gown, I am at your service."

Five minutes afterwards we were in the King's Road, Chelsea, walking arm-in-arm through that bustling thoroughfare as Damon and Pythias might have walked through the streets of old Athens. Damon the second was an elderly friend though, one who was yet to be tried and trusted. An acquaintance had sprung up suddenly—hastily, too—and it is not only hasty marriages that are repented at leisure!

"Halt!" cried Mr. Markingham.

We stopped before a tobacconist's shop, and my companion, twirling the ends of his grey moustache, stood and inspected a row of bills beneath the window.

"Fond of theatres, Woodleigh?"

"I have not been since I was a litt'e boy."

"Did your step-father take you, then?" with a cynical smile.

"My own father did."

"Ah! he was not a hard man, I know. Let us see: *Surrey Theatre, October* 1*st*—oh, that is last week's bill. *Haymarket, Saturday, October* 8*th*, 1842—that's to-night—'*Alma Mater*.' 'Sir Samuel Sarcasm—Mr. Farren; Widow Venture — Mrs. Glover.' Eleventh time of *Grandfather Whitehead*! Shall we go?"

I hesitated. The spectre of Mr. Bowden seemed to pass before my eyes and make a threatening gesture. THE PLAY! the sink of abomination and vice, as Mr. Bowden would have called it—that place at the mention of which my mother had always turned up her eyes and shaken her dear head, the fair target at which every Puritan from the days of William Prynne had fired a shot. It was with a strange sinking at the heart that I answered, "I think I should like to go, if it's not wrong."

Mr. Markingham favored me with his dry laugh.

"Wrong! The stage warns, counsels, holds the mirror up to nature, and teaches us our lessons of humanity pleasantly, which is not a virtue common to teaching in general."

"If—"

"You are your own master—is the shadow of the parson to frighten you now, lad?"

"No."

"You haven't left him behind, and yet brought his starched notions to London with you?" continued the tempter.

"No—I'll go."

I do not believe that there was anything wrong in my decision; pious people would have told me it was my first step downwards; friends with more liberal minds would not have seen the harm in it. Mr. Markingham, a scholar, a thinker, and philosopher, had said the stage teaches, warns, and counsels, and men more clever than he have endorsed that opinion. Much has been written for and against the stage, and will be written till there are no more actors to strut their mimic

hour,—till the lights are turned out for ever.

Still my heart *did* sink as my companion pointed to the bills with his stick and said—"Take your choice;" and a slight suspicion crossed my mind that the philosopher by my side was not exactly a fit companion for a young, thoughtless, and impressionable lad.

He might be a clever and a good-hearted man—Mr. Bowden was both, and yet he had ruined my temper with undue severity. Was this easy freethinker, and Mr. Bowden's very antithesis, to take the opposite side and help to ruin me too?

"Now which is it to be?" said Mr. Markingham, "The *Olympic* and the '*Artful Dodger*,' the *Adelphi* and '*The Owl Sisters*, or the *Haunted Abbey?*'—"

"I think I should like that!" I interrupted eagerly.

"Ah! striking name, is it not?" remarked Mr. Markingham; "but if we are going to the theatre on instructive principles, or to have our minds expanded, I doubt if the '*Owl Sisters*,' although I have no ob-

jection to the company of ladies, is the exact thing for us. Neither," with a glance at the bills again, "is Mr. Paul Bedford as *Norma* an edifying sight, though rather amusing for the first two minutes. Here's *Covent Garden* and Adelaide Kemble as *Semiramide*, and here is *Old Drury*—ah! we'll go to Drury Lane, and see Macready in '*As you like it.*' Are you agreeable?"

"Yes."

"My philosophy tells me I can see very well in the gallery, and as it is the cheapest part of the house, and we have no friends to disgust with our low tastes, why, I think it will suit both us and our pockets. Quick march, Woodleigh junior, we are late."

Mr. Markingham put his long legs to their proper use that evening, and we made for Drury Lane Theatre in dashing style. Mr. Markingham, I soon discovered, was a constant play-goer; he knew something about every play, ancient and modern, that had ever been written; he knew stories of actors and actresses, and all the scandal about them, from Betterton and Mrs. Barry's time down-

wards, and he communicated, during our walk, a few of his liveliest anecdotes, at which I laughed out of compliment, though the point of the joke seemed rather a dull one.

We were before the gallery door of Drury Lane Theatre at last. It was not yet open, and there was a crowd half across the street —a densely packed crowd—at the very sight of which I shuddered. Mr. Markingham and I took our posts at the back, and other pleasure-seekers came and stood beside us and around us, hemming us in their midst, and making respiration a task of some difficulty.

"This is rather a large crowd, is it not?" I asked of my companion.

"There was a larger this day week, when the house opened for the season. Keep your arms down now and go with the tide—they are unfastening the doors."

The doors opened, and a grand rush towards them followed. I *did* keep my arms down, for there was no possibility of getting them up, and I certainly went with the tide—rather fast too, and in rather a confused

manner. Never-to-be-forgotten Saturday night, when I made my first step from Methodism, and went to Drury Lane Theatre with Mr. Markingham. Never-to-be-forgotten crowd of the lower orders, pushing, struggling, fighting, swearing, as it made for the crooked gallery stairs, bearing me with it, driving sharp elbows into my side, smashing my feet, pressing the breath out of my body, tearing my collar, jamming me against hard corners, and squeezing me out of all natural proportion.

I was almost insensible when the money-taker's box was passed, and Mr. Markingham and I were on the stone staircase.

"Oh! I'm so ill."

"You'll be better when you are in the gallery," said Markingham, passing his arm through mine, and trotting me up the stairs; "look sharp!"

In the crowded gallery at last, perched on a back seat, with a sloping field of heads before me, a deafening noise in my ears, and a swimming in my eyes. It was ten minutes before I was able to look round me satis-

factorily, and to inform Mr. Markingham that "I was better now."

"It's a hard struggle on grand nights," said he; "I have been nearly mangled to death in my time. It would not be philosophy to fight one's way to the top shelf here, if there were plenty of money in the purse—heigho!"

"I don't think I shall come very often."

"Wait till you can come in style—opera-glass, white kids, and bouquets for the ladies; I have done all that in 'auld lang syne,' and was not half so happy. Pooh! how warm it is; philosophy says the removal of the upper garment would moderate the heat of the body, and here are plenty of gentlemen in shirt-sleeves to set us an example; but somehow I cannot fancy that, even *now!*"

When the curtain was drawn up, I forgot all my regrets—all about mother, step-father, and the Methodists. I sat entranced by Markingham's side, and gazed at the new world before me, and thought what a fine thing it was to be an actor and wear such very smart clothes.

Grand play-house times they were in those days—old play-goers may well mourn them. Grand assemblage of stars that Saturday night in Shakespere's immortal comedy—stars which have long since wandered from their orbits and gone various ways; some to private life, some far away across seas, some to stage business for themselves, many to their journey's end and the last scene of all!

How strong the spell grew, as act after act passed away. Well that the stage is *sometimes* a moral teacher, for great is the attraction and charm there; better still if it had always in view the lessons it might teach, and the follies it might disperse.

I forgot Mr. Markingham, forgot everything but William the Immortal. When the curtain was drawn up, I was far gone in "As You Like It" (and I did like it exceedingly); when the act-drop was down, I was calculating when I should be able to come to Drury Lane again, and be nearly jammed to death on the gallery stairs. But all things have an end: the play was over, the last words were spoken, the curtain fell, Macready and Mrs.

Nisbett had responded to the general call of 'the house,' and Mr. Markingham was shaking me by the arm.

"Are you ready?"

"Is it ALL over?"

"There is nothing worth waiting for. Some vaudeville comedy or other, which is not deserving the attention of sensible fellows like us."

"I am ready."

Ten minutes afterwards we were in the cool streets, and two hours had not passed before I was in my bed in the three-pair back, dreaming of "As You Like It" over again, with Mr. Markingham on my right hand, and Mr. Bowden on the left, applauding everything.

Thus ended my first day in London, and thus began my career therein.

Was I beginning my new life well or badly? Had all things turned out for the best? Was London a good exchange for Nettleton, Stephen Markingham for Jacob Bowden?

Time, that answereth all questions and solveth all mysteries, was to decide; the

hand of the runaway could not draw aside the curtain which hid the future from view. There were new friends at my side, new faces to meet, new studies to begin everything that was old and had been tried in the past I had abjured.

It would be a hard life of mine, that new one; there would be much to put up with, much of evil to fight against, many troubles and temptations to withstand, or succumb to, before the sun rose on my fortunes, or my fortunes led to that darkness which no sun ever pierced.

CHAPTER V.

TWO YEARS.

I DESIGN this chapter as a record of two years. Two years devoid of interest to him who dips idly into books, or seeks but excitement from their pages,—years which helped to form my character, and passed by more quickly than any that succeeded.

For that period of time I retained my place at uncle Woodleigh's, not without difficulty, and not altogether with satisfaction to myself. My old tempers, my obstinacy, my fits of petulance, the secret envy at the bottom of my heart, were all enemies I had to fight with, and to keep from troubling others.

The earliest evidence I afforded uncle Woodleigh and his son of my excitable temperament was in a regular stand-up fight with Mr. Watkinson the clerk, about six months after my first appearance in the counting-house. Mr. Watkinson was of an overbearing disposition, and a perfect specimen of the jack-in-office. If he had only been a Somerset-House clerk, what a fine opportunity he would have had to distinguish himself! Mr. Watkinson was a young man full of objections;—he had long since objected to my presence in the office, to my looking after the interests of my employer, to my being sharp at "the books," to my pointing out a few errors in names, places, and dates on the order-list, to cousin Upton conversing with me at times,—he had objected to so many things, and in so rude and tyrannical a manner, that at last forgetting our difference of age and the respect due to office-hours, and furthermore aggravated by his pulling my hair and calling me "a sneaking young humbug," I made a rush at him, and had it out at once. Mr. Watkinson was a weak young man for his age, and I was

nearly his match. He was rather frightened at my desperate onset, but he gathered courage after two lively rounds, and we were in the midst of a sharp encounter, with the ledger, pens, and inkstand on the floor, and one office-stool in the fire-place, when Mr. Woodleigh rushed into the counting-house.

Mr. Woodleigh, who was a hasty man, as well as a man of business, gave us both a week's warning on the spot; but cooling down next day, condescended to inquire into the origin of the quarrel.

Mr. Watkinson made his statement, and I made mine. Mr. Watkinson, who was of a mendacious turn of mind, told so many falsehoods—(he had informed me on the day of our first meeting that Mr. Woodleigh lived at Grove House, Tottenham, instead of Grove House, Paddington)—that my plain statement of the facts was quite a virtuous defence in contrast; and so Mr. Watkinson went his way, and I remained. It was singular that that incident, which had threatened to turn out so badly, was the means of starting me in life with better prospects. Alone in the office

after Mr. Watkinson's dismissal, I did that gentleman's work whilst Mr. Woodleigh was advertising for a clerk. Alone, with no one to cross me, and not quite a dunce (thanks to Mr. Bowden), I fulfilled my responsible duties to the satisfaction of uncle and cousin,—so much to their satisfaction, that Upton suggested I should be kept at the work a few weeks longer.

In those few weeks I did my best, being quick enough to see that my position might be benefited thereby. I worked hard and earnestly, and the result was that I became office-clerk in uncle Woodleigh's service, with a salary of twenty-five shillings a-week, and a prospect of an early increase.

I did not save a great deal of money out of my income,—I was never of a saving turn. I increased my stock of clothes, became extravagant in neckties, went more frequently to the play,—spent my money as became a gentleman.

My acquaintance with my relations did not improve in those two years; they kept me at a distance, and though I made no sign, I felt the

slight acutely. It seemed to me very strange and unnatural that my uncle and cousins should think themselves too grand for me, should almost forget that I was a relation at all. Probably my uncle did forget it; his soul was in his business, and he had too much upon his mind to think of the nephew in his counting-house. From six in the morning to six at night he was always raving mad with excitement, rushing about the yard, shouting at the men, swearing at them occasionally, driving in cabs from one railway terminus to another, worrying himself and all nervous persons in his employ to perfect skeletons. Cousin Upton had a great many of his father's traits in his character,—he was as shrewd and quick, and was certainly a better man of business; he took things coolly, made a less number of mistakes, and was more clever with his pen. He was kind to me in his way, too; he did not patronize me, or I should have given warning, or flung the account-books at him, and he called me cousin sometimes. Once or twice, after I had become clerk in the office, he said:—

"We must have you up at Paddington when my brother comes home from college and my mother and sisters return from their travels."

But either they never came home, or their arrival did not remind him of his promise, for the remainder of the two years, of which this chapter is a retrospect, passed without an invitation.

My acquaintance with Mr. Stephen Markingham had made great progress during those two years—we had become the best of friends. Still there was one thing to dislike in Mr. Markingham, and that was the 'Diogenes humor' which he had mentioned on the evening I first called at Barker Street. When that attacked him he was a disagreeable being, a cold, sarcastic, ill-tempered man, who found fault with everything, and sneered at everything that was good and virtuous. I had been once or twice during those two years the object of his bitter attacks, and had rushed out of his room, vowing to cross the threshold no more; but his humor seldom lasted long, and his gracious manner after the fit was over soon wore off the effect.

He was attached to me, he took some pains to teach me a little of his general knowledge, and he became partial to chess and cribbage on a winter's evening. He was a strange man ; he appeared to have no friends, he never talked of his relations, and he lived up to the very last penny of his income, which he made no secret of confessing to be exactly ninety pounds per annum, a sum that he divided into exactly fifty-two portions, and spent one every week. Sunday was his grand day for excursions into the country, and Sunday at first was my day for attending divine service at a little Methodist chapel in the neighbourhood. But Mr. Markingham's bad example soon affected me ; the chapel became irregularly attended, and I sometimes found the excursions into the country with Mr. Markingham an agreeable change. Sunday evenings, too, when Mr. Markingham was absent, were my time for strolling full dressed into the parks, and looking after the girls, as became a youth nearly seventeen years of age, who had taken to a frock-coat and a stand-up collar, which hurt his ears. My two years had seen a change in

my position; I was getting on in the world, my salary was rising,—not that it mattered much, for I spent all my money,—and the three-pair back had been exchanged for the room adjoining Mr. Markingham's.

And in the two years of that life which drifted by so quietly, which I took so calmly and profited in so little, what of the friends I had deserted? I had written to my mother again, telling her my address, of the kindness of my uncle, of my situation, and of the new friend I had made, and she had answered me in a long letter of four pages, crossed and recrossed, and nearly undecipherable. Her letter was full of regrets and forgiveness for my late conduct; full of prayers, too, that I would strive to be good, to deserve my uncle's kindness, and to resist every temptation to folly and wickedness. She mentioned Mr. Bowden, told me that he mourned over my obduracy, and regretted that I had not spoken of earning my own living, in lieu of leaving home and my best friends in so reckless a manner. My mother did not ask me to return; she knew my nature too well to think I would

consent, and perhaps Mr. Bowden thought a little buffeting with the world would bring me to my senses.

My mother and I corresponded frequently after that letter (I had not left off loving my mother because I had deserted her), and I received all the news of Nettleton in exchange for my little confidential notes.

At the end of those two years my mother came to see me. It was an autumn evening; my philosophical friend and I had the chess-board between us at the window, for the advantage of the little daylight left, when my mother came panting up the stairs. The door of the room was open, and she halted on the threshold, looked in, and, after an effort to recover her breath, asked which was Mr. Woodleigh's room.

I jumped from my seat, and upset the chess-board and men into Mr. Markingham's lap—that dear, old, well-known voice!

"What, mother!"

The buxom figure in the doorway started, the rosy color on the cheeks vanished, the basket in the hand was dropped, there was a

short gurgling sob, and then my mother was in my arms.

"Oh! Robert, it *is* you then," my mother cried. "My dear, dear boy, I am so glad to see you!"

I turned away my head, I stared over my shoulder at the doorway, I looked upon the well-remembered pattern of the straw bonnet and brown ribbons, I glanced askance at Mr. Markingham, but I could not keep the tears away, they brimmed over and went rolling down my cheeks. Poor mother! how she sobbed, and yet how happy she was, with the runaway pressed to her bosom as tightly as if she never meant to let him go again. No reproaches, no talk of my old misdeeds—which were stabbing me to the heart then—nothing but delight at seeing me!

She released me at last, dropped into the first vacant chair, and, holding my hand in hers, looked at me from out her swimming eyes.

"I should have hardly known you, Robert," she said, her voice still trembling; "you have so altered, grown so tall, so, so—"

"Good-looking, ma'am," suggested Mr. Markingham.

"Yes, sir, exactly," responded my mother, turning to my friend; "he has improved, and he *is* good-looking—very! His poor father said he would be, when he was quite a baby."

"What nonsense!" said I, coloring.

"Oh! he knows it well enough, Mrs. Woodleigh; you should see him at the looking-glass every morning, it's painful."

"And you, sir, I presume, are Mr. Markingham?"

"At your service, ma'am," with a courteous bow.

"I hope you do not find my Robert troublesome, sir. He's a very good boy—so docile, so easy to manage, so—oh! dear me, I forgot."

My mother's blank look caused Mr. Markingham to stare intently into Barker Street.

"And what is the news down at Nettleton, mother?" I asked.

"Well, my dear boy, there's a great deal of news, I hardly know where to begin. We've

had a new pulpit in the chapel—walnut-wood, my dear—presented to your father by the congregation."

"How very kind!"

"And old Mrs. Arrow is dead, and Tom will come into all her money when he is of age—poor rackety lad! what ducks and drakes he will make of it."

"How is he?"

"Well, I don't know, Robert. I believe he has left Nettleton and come to London. Oh! my dear boy, I hope he will not find you out."

"And the Heberdeens, mother?"

"Mrs. Heberdeen is very ill, and not expected to live one day after another, poor lady, and—good gracious."

Mr. Markingham, who had replaced the chess-board and men on the table, suddenly knocked them over again, and sprung to his feet.

"Your pardon, madam; this room is very hot to-night, and—and I fear I am intruding upon this happy meeting of mother and son. Robert, don't think of going—pray remain

here; your own room is very small. I shall not be back till late. Good evening."

Mr. Markingham was gone.

"What a singular man!" exclaimed my mother.

"A good man, mother."

"Rather abrupt, I think; but very kind of him to leave us to ourselves. But now tell me of your uncle and cousins; I am very anxious to know all about them, and as I must go back to-morrow morning by the first train, we have not a minute to spare, dear. Your landlady has a vacant bed for me, so I shall not have to run about any more to-night."

I told her all I knew concerning my relations, and my mother was quite surprised to hear that I was not asked every Sunday to my uncle's; and, had time permitted, would probably have gone with me to business in the morning to enquire the reason.

After the news had been exhausted on both sides, Mrs. Bants brought in lights and my mother's basket, which had been dropped on the landing in the first moment of recognition.

When Mrs. Bants had retired, my mother

opened the basket and covered the table with packages.

"There's some tea, dear, and here's a pot of jam—you were fond of my red currant jam once, Robert—and this is your congretional hymn-book, which you forgot to take away with you; and these," taking up a large packet, and laying it down again, "are some books which your father has selected for your perusal, and that," indicating large packet No. 2, "is the Grooks pills you asked for in your last letter."

"I asked for, mother?"

"Well, perhaps I mentioned it myself in *my* last letter—it's of no consequence, my dear. Here they are, and I hope you won't neglect them."

The evening passed away, and the morning hurried my mother back to Nettleton, whither she went with a great load off her heart. She had found me well, in what she considered good hands, and with a prospect of getting on in the world; therefore, her long-looked for journey to London had done her a vast amount of good.

"Keep steady, my darling boy — don't spend all your money ; go regularly to chapel, and read a little of your Bible every day—now *do !*"

So, with these last injunctions, accompanied by fifty kisses and a hundred blessings, mother and son parted once more.

So the two years came to an end, and the circle of my acquaintance widened not. Stephen Markingham, the philosopher, was my home companion, as in the beginning of that era, and uncle Woodleigh and cousin Upton were the only relations whom I had seen since I had entered their service. Had my aunt and cousins returned from their tour on the continent, and was it their pride, their wish, that kept the doors of Grove House barred against me ?—kept me to the wearisome desk-work, the long rows of figures, the strange morbid thoughts that sometimes perplexed me? Thoughts of the world before me, and whether it were to be always the same dull, quiet, lead-colored world ; of the life beyond, whether it were to be the same still and methodical life,—to run on for ever

in one uneventful channel, with nothing to unsettle it or direct it from its course?

But the still waters were running deep, and bearing me on to new hopes and new cares.

END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

BOOK IV.

"Some say, Love,
Foolish Love,
Doth rule and govern all the Gods:
I say Love,
Inconstant Love,
Sets men's senses far at odds."

ROBERT GREENE.

"*Mal.* May it beseeme a wise man to be in love?
Free. Let wise men alone, t'will beseeme thee, and me well enough."

JOHN MARSTON.

CHAPTER I.

COUSINS.

JANUARY, 1845. A bright wintry morning. A fire burning cheerfully in the counting-house of James Woodleigh, railway carrier; a clock in the corner ticking its way to eleven; a clerk, one Robert Woodleigh, late of Nettleton, at his post on the long-legged stool before the desk and account-books.

I, Robert Woodleigh, had the counting-house, long-legged stool, desk, and account-books all to myself, Mr. Woodleigh, senior, having started into the country in search of another contract, cousin Upton being at the railway station, and the new office boy, who

had been sent post-haste with a letter, enjoying himself in the next street with a tribe of ragamuffins and a Punch and Judy.

I was not in working humor that morning; the weather was cold, the long-legged stool was some yards from the fire-place, and uncle and cousin were not there to overlook me. I put my pen behind my ear, insinuated my hands into my pockets, and fell into a brown study, from which it took two taps on the office door to arouse me—the last a smart one, the person without having evidently become impatient.

"Come in.—Hollo!"

The last exclamation escaped me before I had time to recover my surprise.

"Is Mr. Upton Woodleigh within?"

The new comer was a lady of about the middle height, a lady with a prominent forehead, beneath which shone a pair of large and lustrous eyes. A young lady who was thin and pale, and yet, somehow, pretty; not a lady with a belle-of-the-season face, but still one to be struck with at first sight, and—to pick to

pieces afterwards! There was not a perfect feature within the little velvet bonnet—the eyes were too large, too disproportionate, the nose was small and sharp, and the lips were thin and of a vixenly closeness that suggested suspicions of a small amount of amiability, or a large amount of decision, firmness, obstinacy, —whichever you like, my dear lady-readers, I believe it is all the same.

She gave a quick glance round the counting-house and changed her question.

"Will it be long before Mr. Upton returns?"

The lady was rather abrupt, and my dignity was ruffled in consequence. I was quite a young man—eighteen next November, and it would not have taken a great deal more time to have added, "Sir," to question No. 2!

"Mr. Upton, I believe, will not be long, Miss. Will you call again, or will you—ahem?"

I was about to add, "take a chair," but remembering there was but Upton's office stool to offer her, four feet high at least,

I stopped the suggestion by a cough before I had committed myself.

"There is no occasion for us to call again—I think it will be better to wait. You say he will not be long?"

"He said he would return before eleven, Miss," I replied.

"Then I think we'll wait."

"*We!*" What did she mean by "we?" Was she the editor of a magazine, or a new partner introduced into the firm? Whilst considering these questions, the strange lady solved the mystery by re-opening the office door and addressing some person or persons outside.

"He's not within."

"Oh, dear! how disappointing," answered a soft musical voice—a voice that set me listening attentively.

"The clerk tells me he promised to return before eleven."

"Then we'll come in and wait."

There was some laughing, whispering, a rustling of dresses; the lady with whom I had exchanged a few words stepped aside to allow

ingress to two more ladies—both young, both pretty, both cosily wrapped in furs as a preventative against the January frosts. I caught myself sliding off the long-legged stool, and bowing this influx of fair faces into the office. I felt my cheeks flushing and my ears tingling, and was conscious of a strong sensation of choking in the throat.

The two last comers were my cousins; I was sure of it, although time had made young women of them, and altered every feature since I had seen them last. I knew them both in an instant—which was Caroline and which was Constance. Caroline was the tall one, with the fair hair and the Upton Woodleigh look, and she with the hair a shade more dark, yet fair-haired also—she with the ringlets, the laughing blue eyes, the peach bloom on the cheeks, was Constance—Constance the sunny face, as her doting father used to call her nine years ago. I wondered if he ever called her "Sunny-face" now, supposing his business allowed him time to call her anything?

My position was becoming embarrassing;

my cousins did not know me. Uncle Woodleigh had probably not mentioned the relationship between him and his clerk; I was a stranger to them—the ghost of a bow from my cousins just acknowledged the existence of some unimportant being in the vicinity, and that was all.

The lady with the prominent forehead—the first who had intruded upon the sacred precincts of office—broke the silence by addressing my cousins.

"I am afraid, ladies, you will have to stand."

"I am not tired," responded the elder sister, and, "I could stand all day to wait for dear old Upton," remarked my cousin Constance.

Caroline Woodleigh was a sharp young woman, and without a doubt had an eye to her father's interests; for, glancing at me, she remarked:—

"I hope we are not hindering you from business, young man."

"Oh, no! not at all, thank you," said I, mounting the office stool, and making a

savage scratch with my pen. I was an ill-tempered, foolish fellow, and actually angry with my cousins for not knowing me! Perhaps they did know me? That was a thought which checked me in a preliminary flourish, and set my teeth grinding away like millstones. If I could be only sure that they had recognized me, and were showing off their airs of superiority over their poor relation, I would get off my office stool, and leave them alone in their glory. I began to make very fierce down-strokes, and to scowl ferociously at the ledger. Meanwhile, the ladies conversed in a low tone.

"How surprised Upton will be," said Constance; "and how delighted to see us again. Oh! I hope he will not be long!"

"It is nearly eleven now," said Caroline, looking at the clock over the mantelpiece.

"Perhaps he will not know us," cried Constance, with a merry little laugh. "Do you think two years travelling have altered us very much, Miss Bowden."

Bowden! I twirled round on my stool

and looked at the lady addressed. Bowden, Bowden! Could it really be *his* daughter? There was a likeness—that prominent forehead was suspicious. Oh, yes! there was the Bowden look. She was the lost daughter of my Methodist step-father!

The large eyes met mine, and made me flinch. Such a steady, searching, I-wonder-at-your-impudence look!

"Did you speak, sir?" she asked, quietly.

"No, mum—miss."

I twirled back to my original position, and wrote in the ledger "January 14th. Delivered to Miss Bowden, two tons of pig-iron!"

"I am sure we are disturbing this young man," suggested my eldest cousin. "I think we had better wait for Upton at the gates, Constance."

"Not disturbing me at all, Miss Woodleigh," I muttered, over the ledger.

My cousins exchanged glances, and I heard Constance whisper. "He knows we are Upton's sisters, Carry."

"I suppose he thinks sisters have only a

right to enter a brother's office in so unceremonious a manner," was the answer.

They did not know me, then; there was some satisfaction in being convinced of that fact, and I returned to my accounts with a mind more at ease.

The clock ticked on, struck eleven, and no Upton. The sisters stood and talked to Miss Bowden and each other, criticized the office and its furniture, criticized me, I believe, in a lower tone, for there was a great deal of suppressed laughter from cousin Constance. Although I had affirmed that the presence of the ladies was no hindrance to business, it was quite evident that I was not getting on very rapidly, and that the entries in the great ledger were not so accurate as they might have been. Three ladies, chatting in a study, may give life and animation to the scene, but are slightly calculated to disturb the ideas of the student in the corner, especially when one of the ladies is as full of vivacity as "sweet seventeen" should be.

And she was very merry *then*, was Constance Woodleigh; life lay before her in the

brightest of colors, and there was nothing from her point of view to cast a shade over the landscape. Pretty flower of home, a favorite with father, mother, brothers, and sisters; health, wealth, and content to surround her; friends to love her and make much of her, what was to stand before her in the outset of life, and check her in that happy spring time which comes once to us all?

How light-hearted she was that day; her good spirits were quite contagious, and put everybody in the best of tempers, and had it not been for my bashfulness and my sense of decorum in office-hours, I could have jumped from my stool and run with extended hands to my cousins to assert my relationship.

Upton Woodleigh arrived at ten minutes past eleven; he came in after his own and his father's bustling manner, and had hung up his hat and slipped off his great-coat before he was conscious of the feminine invasion. His face lighted up when he made the discovery, and instantly his sisters were both in his arms, in one delightful heap.

"Well, I'm so glad to see you, girls—I'm

so precious glad you are back again!" said he, kissing them; "two years have seemed like twenty-two without you. How well you are looking, Caroline—and Constance is grown out of all knowledge—and how's mother? is her health better?" he asked, anxiously; "has all this travelling done her any good, now?"

"She is much better, Upton," replied Caroline; "she hopes you will leave business to-day very early. We could hardly dissuade her from accompanying us."

"I'll leave at once. Robert can manage well enough. I'll run home directly."

He was out of his sister's arms and in his great-coat and hat again with pantomimic celerity.

"When will papa return?" inquired Constance.

"To-morrow. He went down to Bristol two days earlier than he intended, in order to be home by Thursday—you said we were to expect you on Thursday, Constance."

"That was my stratagem," she answered, with that musical, heart-thrilling laugh again,

"I wished to come home and take you by surprise."

"How deceitful you are growing, Constance," said Upton; "what do you think, Miss Bowden, is it quite right in a young lady, seventeen next month, to play these tricks and tell these stories? When she was under your tuition, with little Mary, you would not have allowed such conduct, I am sure."

Miss Bowden smiled in a grim manner that reminded me of her father, and replied:

"Miss Clewly, I have no doubt, has paid every attention to Miss Constance—she is a lady in whom every confidence can be placed."

This was taking a joke in a literal sense, and as Miss Bowden looked grave and pursed her lips, there was a slight appearance of discomfiture on the face of Upton Woodleigh.

"Oh! of course," said he; "I was only joking, you know. I did not mean to cast any reflections on Constance's governess—far from it."

"Mother's travelling-companion, you mean, Upton, dear," Constance corrected.

"Of course I mean that too," said Upton; "what a many mistakes I am making this morning, to be sure! You are everything that is elegant and accomplished by this time, Constance, and quite out of the leading-strings of the governesses of England; who can doubt it? Well, let us be off—look sharp after the men, Rob—"

He stopped, glanced from me to his sisters, scratched his head, and burst into a laugh.

"Don't you know?" he said, turning to his sisters. "Haven't you told them?" wheeling round to me.

"Know what?" said the sisters Woodleigh, and "No, I haven't, what was the good of it?" I answered.

"Did I not mention it in one of my letters, Carry?" asked Upton; "I certainly intended."

"Mentioned what?" exclaimed Carry, becoming impatient; "how tiresome you are!"

"That this young gentleman," pointing to

me, "is Mr. Robert Woodleigh, from Nettleton, a first cousin of ours, who has given up the daisies for the hard London stones — Robert, come off that stool and show yourself."

I was soon shaking hands with my cousins, and answering fifty questions about Nettleton, my mother, and myself.

"And why did you not tell us you were cousin Robert?" asked Constance, after I had replied to several of their questions, and told them my mother was well and married again.

"Well, I hardly know," I stammered; "I thought it might frighten you, Miss Constance, and I was not quite certain—"

"Of what?"

"Whether you would be glad to see me!"

"Why not?"

"I don't know—it was only a silly thought of mine. I am glad to find you have not forgotten me."

Caroline changed the subject by reverting to her former questions.

"And so Aunt Woodleigh is married again —to a gentleman?"

"To a minister—a Methodist."

Miss Bowden started.

"Oh, indeed; I am glad to hear she has made so good a match—what is his—why, my dear Miss Bowden how pale you are!"

"Am I?" she answered, calmly.

"Do you feel faint?"

"No, Miss Woodleigh, I feel very well, thank you. It's getting late; your mother will be anxious about us."

"Perhaps this room is too warm for you after the cold air?" said Constance. "Shall we see about returning?"

"Pray do not hurry on my account," coolly replied Miss Bowden; "you were about to ask a question of your cousin—your aunt's husband's name, I think. I believe, Mr. Woodleigh,"—turning to me—"the gentleman's name is Bowden?"

"That is his name, Miss," I answered.

"I thought I was right—Mr. Bowden, a relation of mine."

"How singular!" exclaimed my female cousins.

"Two years ago, I heard from strangers

that he was married," said Miss Bowden; "but I had no idea the happy bride was allied to friends of mine. Yes, Mr. Bowden is a relation, and a good and devout man too."

"Rather firm, perhaps," added Upton, with a sly glance that assured me my story of two years since was still remembered.

"Yes, *rather* firm," I answered.

"And inclined to his own opinion, eh, Robert?"

"Mr. Bowden is a relation of mine, Mr. Upton," said Miss Bowden, with some asperity; "and I cannot think him the most becoming subject for a jest in my presence."

"Ten thousand pardons," cried Upton. "I would not hurt your feelings for the world; and I no more consider a good man a proper subject for a jest than you do yourself, Miss Bowden. I hope I have not pained you?"

"No," with a forced smile; "I merely called your attention to my proximity. Perhaps

I am too particular, too captious—have brought my governess airs out with me this morning. I am ready, ladies."

My cousins shook hands with me, Caroline expressing her satisfaction at meeting me again, Constance, who was younger and less self-possessed, saying nothing but 'good day,' and Upton bestowing on me a friendly nod, and adding, "Back again in the afternoon, Robert." As for Miss Bowden, although I held the door open for her, and said "good morning" in my best manner, she drew herself up stiffly and swept out of the office, without so much as a bend of the head in my direction.

When they were gone, and I was alone again, my old vicious discontented feelings began to rise within me—my sense of slight to become painfully acute.

"The old story," I muttered; "the poor cousin is good enough to say 'good day' to, —to exchange a few silly words with about the weather, my mother, or the old times; but he is too low in the scale to be treated as a friend and an equal. Every word they say, and every act they do, implies I am the ser-

vant, and our difference of position sinks the ties of kindred."

Well, and if all that I was brooding over had been true as gospel, would it have been a fair subject to grumble at? Rich people are never very fond of their poor relations, and it is not one of the manners and customs of the English to single them out, walk arm-in-arm with them, introduce them to the circle of the select.

Everybody well-to-do in the world has a poor relation, and that relation is a lucky fellow to get patronized at all, and an ungrateful mortal to grow morbid and sarcastic because the patronizer has had the start of him up the greasy pole—that greasy, slippery pole of life—and got the leg of mutton first!

Bah! that is a low comparison, worthy of a young man fond of fire-works, fighting, and Nettleton fair.

I was wrong in my calculations, however. There was no pride in the Woodleighs; they had sprung from small beginnings, and, *mirabile dictu*, had not forgotten the date of

their rise; they knew the value of money and the position that money gave them, possibly; but a family less pretentious under the circumstances, I have never met with in my experience of life.

When Upton returned in the afternoon, he resolved all my doubts, set at rest all my jealous scruples, by his very first speech.

"I say, Robert, you are to come to Grove House next Sunday, the girls will not listen to a word of denial. Dick will be home on Sunday, too; so it will be worth your while to come to Paddington, now. Consider yourself booked, old fellow."

"Thank you."

"You will come?"

"What is the good of troubling Grove House with my presence, Upton?—I'm not fit for grand society."

"Oh! you will be quite at home. You will not find any of us of the stuck-up genus—we are as matter-of-fact homely people as ever we were."

"I'll come, then."

"We dine at four; and if I should not

mention it again, Robert, don't take offence and stop away."

"Business makes you forgetful," said I, drily.

He laughed.

"I certainly omitted to mention your name to my mother and sisters in my letters, and it was no good telling Miss Bowden, was it?"

"No," I answered; "and this Miss Bowden, is she a governess?"

"She is little Mary's governess—was once Constance's."

"Do you like her?" I asked.

"Yes, I do," said Upton, frankly, "though she's a queer girl, rather fond of sulking and taking offence, like, like—hanged if I know whom she is like, unless it's cousin Robert!"

"Am I a sulky being, then?"

"Sometimes; and Miss Bowden is only 'sometimes,' of course," said Upton; "she's an eccentric girl, but nobody can help liking her, or making her a favorite; she's so sharp, so clever, and so fond of little Mary.

Miss Bowden has been housekeeper as well as governess since ill health compelled my mother to leave England, and a first-rate manager she has been, upon my word. Still, she has her faults, bumping ones, and if little Mary did not like her better than mother, father, or any of us, I think she would have left Grove House long ago. However, we begin to understand her now, and she's as good-hearted a little spitfire as ever lived, after all."

"Who is Miss Clewly?"

"She was Constance's governess abroad, now she is mother's companion; presently, she will be nowhere on the establishment of the Woodleighs, or I don't know Miss Amelia Bowden."

"Indeed!"

"Two of a trade never agree, and Miss B. will—but this is old woman's tattle! Whatever would the governor think of me—his steady, business-loving boy, as he told somebody once—gossipping and backbiting in this outrageous style. Where's a pen, where's that boy Jack, I wonder?—here, hollo there,"

flinging up the window and shouting to the men across the yard—"look alive with that van, or you'll be too late for the train, sleepy heads!"

CHAPTER II.

A FRIENDLY WARNING.

"If I were you, friend Woodleigh, I should decline the honor," observed Mr. Markingham, after I had informed him of the invitation which I had received for the ensuing Sunday.

Mr. Markingham was at home in attitude on the sofa, his faded dressing-gown wrapped round him, and the stem of his favorite meerschaum pipe between his lips.

"Decline it, sir?" I repeated.

"There's not philosophy in accepting the invitation," said he, "not philosophy in step-

ping into a false position and making yourself uncomfortable. Tradesmen, as these Woodleighs are, still they are above you, and move in a sphere of which you know nothing. You," with one of his sneers, " are from the country ! "

" Never mind that," I replied; " I have a friend who has mixed in first-rate society, and he will give me a few lessons in manners before I set forth."

" Perhaps so," said Mr. Markingham ; " that friend will consider your hint, which is not a bad one. Have you made up your mind to go ? "

" Yes."

" Have you reflected that it is not in your nature to take kindly to grand people, relations or no relations ? " he continued.

" I have not thought a great deal about it yet."

" That your highness may become dissatisfied with your clerkship, with No. 2, Barker Street, even with the gentleman in the two-pair front ? "

" Am I so discontented a being ? "

"All that is amiable and lovable, my dear sir, at present," he answered. "Still, discontent may seize you, and that same discontent is a man of the mountain that is not to be shaken off in a hurry! How many cousins have you?"

"Six."

"A large tribe—what are their names, Woodleigh?"

"Caroline, Constance, and Mary—Richard, Upton, and John."

Mr. Markingham took his pipe from his lips and reflected for several moments.

"And how old is Caroline?" he inquired at last.

"Twenty-three."

"And Mary and Constance?"

"Mary was ten last December, and—"

"You are well up in their ages, Robert—but I interrupt you."

"And Constance is seventeen next month."

"Ah! take care of *that* cousin!"

I laughed.

"Seventeen, and a first cousin—is she pretty, Robert?"

"Yes—I think so."

"The Humane Society ought to label her 'Dangerous.' Now, Robert the reckless, will you receive a little advice from—ahem—a philosopher?"

"With pleasure."

"Make up your mind to regard that young-lady cousin with the romantic name as something far above your reach. There is a familiarity between cousins that breeds ambitious hopes sometimes — *prenez garde!*"

"I am too young to fall in love," replied I, with a laugh, "and," with that old frown of mine, "I know my place well enough by this time."

"Don't indulge in visionary ideas of making a fortune and a name—of papa Woodleigh giving you his blessing, patting you on the back, and saying 'Take her, my boy—here's fifty thousand pounds to begin the world with!'—for there will come a waking from the dream, and a papa Woodleigh kicking you politely into the street."

Mr. Markingham did not refer again to the

subject till the Sunday morning arrived and I was ready to depart.

"You will do," said he, after a critical survey of me, "and you might look a worse specimen of humanity for a youth nineteen next November."

"Eighteen next November."

"Only eighteen—how time crawls along, don't it?"

"Rather slowly."

"Ah! thoughtless youth in a hurry to get on in the world says that—men, past the Rubicon, cry 'Oh Time, how swiftly you bear us on to Eternity!' Ahem! almost poetical, that will not do for sober Philosophy. So you are off?"

"Yes."

"A pleasant day to you. I say—it's not a dinner-party, is it?"

"I hope not. What made you think of anything so awful, Mr. Markingham?"

"I don't know. I'm in a gloomy humor, and there is a rush of forebodings coming uppermost. You had better be off before I throw a wet blanket over your hopes of enjoy-

ment. Good day, and once again," with mock solemnity, "take care of that cousin, O Woodleigh!"

I was soon in the street, marching towards Paddington. It was a fine day; the sun was shining and my spirits were light. I was going to spend the day with my cousins, and I had always liked my cousins in my heart. I should see Dick once more, and the twins who were babies in arms when my mother went to Nettleton, and Caroline, and Constance surnamed the Sunny Face.

"*Take care of that cousin!*"

Strange warning words of Stephen Markingham, that were ringing in my ears all the way to Paddington, that made me smile, too, for I knew how foolish it would be for me to fall in love—me, a clerk with a small salary, a discontent, "a black sheep!"

The Fates led me on, marched side by side with me, winked at each other over my shoulder as I strode onwards, gay and lighthearted.

Looking back at the past, at that never forgotten Sunday from which dates many a folly,

trouble and regret, I often wonder now how the world would have treated me if I had turned my back on Grove House, Paddington, and gone another way!

CHAPTER III.

GROVE HOUSE.

It was half-past three in the afternoon when I was standing in the shadow of the imposing portico of Grove House, Paddington, making up my mind to knock. Grove House was a stylish edifice of modern build, that came out strong in stucco-work and plate-glass windows. There was a large garden and carriage-drive before the house, and I had walked slowly along the drive thinking of the luck which falls in some people's way. Here was uncle Woodleigh, not a clever man, not a wonderful man for business, making money by hundreds every week, and living like a gentle-

man; and, in poor lodgings, down a back street in Chelsea, I had left behind a shrewd and clever man, one who seemed to know everything, and whose income was exactly ninety pounds per annum. Still, Mr. Markingham was not a fair example to quote—he might have done better had his philosophy of idleness allowed him; Mr. Bowden made a better contrast, for he was a hard-worker and a clever man, too, and yet how low down he was in the scale!

Thinking of Mr. Bowden, it was somewhat singular to be shown into a room in which his daughter and a little girl were seated. It was more singular still, considering Miss Bowden's previous reserve, to find her bowing graciously and smiling like an angel. She had a peculiar smile, too; so soft and pleasing a one that, while it lasted, the expression of the face was wholly changed.

"Good morning, Mr. Woodleigh."

"Good morning, Miss Bowden."

"Pray be seated; your uncle will be here in a moment."

After taking a seat, looking round the room, admiring the pattern of the carpet,

struggling with some natural boyish confusion of mine, I ventured to inquire if all my cousins were well.

"Quite well, thank you," said Miss Bowden in reply; "they have not yet returned from their walk."

I was growing more confused, Miss Bowden seemed to look at me so steadfastly. Vague suspicions began to torture me. Was anything the matter? Had my collar come undone, my neckerchief disarranged, or had some London blacks settled on my shirt-front?

"Has Mr. Richard arrived?" I asked, after another long pause.

"Yes—he," with a second smile, "is at home—at least, I know nothing to the contrary."

Survey of the room again. The pattern of the carpet was rather large and showy, and the portrait of Mr. Woodleigh opposite was not a bit like him, it was much too flattering about the nose.

"Here is a little cousin of yours, Mr. Woodleigh," said Miss Bowden, laying her

hand on the dark curls of the child who clung shyly to her skirt. "Mary, dear, go and shake hands with your cousin Robert."

Mary advanced and I shook hands with her. Mary hoped I was quite well, and I said "yes, mum, miss," and then looked at the portrait again, at the carpet, at the fire burning brightly in the steel grate opposite.

"Shall I tell papa my cousin has come?" I heard her whisper to her governess.

"No, dear."

A moment after, Miss Bowden probably withdrew her prohibition, for, after another whisper, my cousin Mary, regarding me with round staring eyes, sidled out of the room and left me alone with Miss Bowden. The door had hardly closed before Miss Bowden said quickly :—

"He is well, I hope?"

"Who, Miss?"

"My—your step-father."

"I beg pardon, but I did not hear you mention his name."

"Perhaps I did not mention it—he was in my thoughts, however—*is* he well?"

"Quite well, Miss Bowden, I believe."

She reflected a moment before she said in a low tone:—

"Are you aware of the nature of the relationship between us?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Have you written to your mother—to *him* lately?"

"No."

"Don't write a word concerning me to him," she said, in a hurried, excited voice; "it can do no good, for we are better separated. He thinks he can forget and forgive the past, but its shadow would ever darken our reunion."

"He has always spoken kindly of you, Miss Bowden—has always regretted—"

"Hush," she cried; "I know it, but I cannot restore him peace, and I will keep away. He is not alone now, and if your mother make him a good wife, be only of a loving, *obedient* nature, he is happy, and," she added bitterly, "I would not mar that happiness with *my* presence!"

"But—"

"Were you happy with him, Mr. Woodleigh?" she asked anxiously.

"No, Miss Bowden, I was not."

"You found him stern, harsh, unable to appreciate your motives, inclined to put a false construction on them, to—to—to—" she repeated rapidly, "interdict your wishes, hopes, ambitions, harmless though they were; because he, with his narrow mind, saw evil, or the coming of evil, in them. To—" she paused, her excitement suddenly vanished, the smiles returned, and she was once more the well-bred, self-possessed young lady; "but I am very foolish. What a time Mr. Woodleigh is!"

"Yes, but—"

"Don't hesitate for my sake," she said sharply; "you were about to speak of Mr. Bowden again."

"Yes," replied I, the color mounting to my face; "I wished to say that although Mr. Bowden was stern and harsh towards me, yet it is but fair to add that I was generally in the wrong, and I think now—though I would not go back for all the world—that it was a

foolish act of mine to run away from home."

"You ran away?"

"Yes—he," the color deepening on my cheek, "struck me."

Miss Bowden looked thoughtfully at the fire, and then at me, with an expression of awakening interest in her full bright eyes.

"We will not dwell longer upon the subject," said Miss Bowden; "it is a painful one to me—to both of us. Your relations are not aware Mr. Bowden is my father, and I have not attempted to narrate a painful history. May I once more ask you not to mention my name in letters home?"

Before I could reply, the door opened, and uncle Woodleigh, hand-in-hand with his daughter Mary, entered.

"How d'ye do, Robert, glad to see you," he said, with his customary volubility; "why haven't you called before, you knew where we lived? Miss Bowden, have you seen anything of the girls and Upton? It's very silly of them

to begin all manner of long walks just as dinner is ready."

A knocking at the street-door came in as accompaniment to this address.

"Oh! here they are. Dear me," rubbing the back of his ear in a nervous manner, "I wonder how long Dick means to lie in bed? We have got Dick home again for a little while, Robert," said he, his face brightening; "you will be glad to see him; he's grown such a fine fellow, and confound it," with an irritable stamp of his foot, "he ought to know we dine at four o'clock on Sundays, by this time. Miss Bowden, will you be good enough to see—I beg pardon, will you be good enough to send some one upstairs to see whether he is up yet. I wouldn't wait dinner for Queen Victoria herself."

My cousins Caroline, Constance, and Upton entered the room, and welcomed me to Grove House. They were really glad to see me, and I began to feel less embarrassed in the midst of my relations. There was another cousin made his appearance, however, and rushed at me to confound me. My cousin

Johnny, a red-faced, crop-haired little rascal, with not one atom of reserve in his whole disposition. His attack was rather startling —he flung himself at me with extraordinary impetuosity, jumping on my feet and trying to lift himself into my lap by the buttons of my best coat.

"Johnny, sir, be quiet!" cried Mr. Woodleigh.

"He's *my* cousin, isn't he—Upton told me he was coming—I want to sit on his knee!"

"You are too big to be nursed, sir," remonstrated Caroline.

"No, I ain't," he bawled, "and you won't mind, will you? I want to ask all about you, and where you come from, and what my aunt's like."

I took him on my knee, with a sickly smile at the assembled company, and felt there was one cousin at least to whom I should never be deeply attached; he was a spoilt boy, a horridly aggravating boy; I knew it the moment after he had introduced himself to my notice—when he was on my knee, trying to wrench a neat little gold stud out of my

shirt-front, in which operation he was fortunately checked by the announcement of dinner.

There was just a little ceremony in passing into the dining-room, and for which Mr. Markingham had kindly prepared me. Mr. Woodleigh offered his arm to Miss Bowden, Caroline took her brother Upton's arm, and *that cousin* was left for me. And that cousin was looking very pretty, and should have been labelled "dangerous," as Mr. Markingham had suggested. But I was on my guard. I was not going to fall in love with a silvery laugh, a pair of blue eyes, some ringlets, and two red pouting lips that called me cousin—NO!

We went into the dining-room, with Johnny hanging to the skirts of my coat, and retarding my progress; with Johnny laughing, and Constance laughing, too, though she attempted to frown, as she bade him desist. In the dining-room I found aunt Woodleigh waiting to receive me.

What a difference had ten years made in Mrs. James Woodleigh—what a difference, for

the matter of that, will ten years make in us all! Honey-tongued friends may tell us we are looking as well as ever, but we don't believe them, though we laugh and are flattered. Ten years make a great gulf between the past and the present, a deep well at the bottom of which lie all our good looks (as well as our past hopes and ambitions), and there is no fishing one of them back again!

Ten years ago, Mrs. Woodleigh, of Paddington, was a pretty woman of thirty-five years of age; now one would have thought her five-and-fifty at least. Her form was attenuated, her face was thin and deep-lined, and she was fast becoming an elderly lady. Ten years, too, had made some changes in a naturally good temper, and I daresay ten long years of indisposition would alter a great many people for the worse, as well as Mrs. Woodleigh. Mrs. Woodleigh had become peevish, at times a little childish—all her good spirits of thirty-five had long since evaporated; all that witty pleasantry which had first captivated James Woodleigh in his courting days had gone

too. It is a hard effort to be merry with something the matter with the liver—try it, reader!

Nevertheless, Mrs. Woodleigh was, even in 1845, not entirely a fretful woman; there were her children to love and make much of, to brighten her home and her own heart; and Mrs. Woodleigh was a true mother, who found comfort in her children and made them the chief topic of conversation. Her children, like the old kings of England, could do no wrong; they were all brimming with virtues and wonderfully accomplished; there were no children in the whole wide world like them! Ah! if we were only as clever as our mothers think us, what a surprising world this would be, and how full of genius!

"Well, Master Robert," said Aunt Woodleigh, after a cursory glance at me through her eyeglass, "so you have come to London again. How do you do, my child?"

"Very well, thank you, aunt."

"I wish I could say the same, Robert," said she with a half sigh, as I shook hands with her, "but I must not think of being very well again, I suppose. Travel and

change of air only make me worse—oh ! dear me, it was only last summer that—"

"My dear," said Mr. Woodleigh, cutting short the recital of last year's indisposition, "dinner is on the table. Robert, take a seat, please. Johnny, you had better go upstairs, now."

Johnny, at this suggestion, rushed towards his mother, and burying his face in her lap, gave vent to a loud howl.

Mr. Woodleigh lost his temper.

"Somebody ring the bell, or kick that boy out ! How provoking he is to-day."

"I want to have dinner—down here," sobbed Johnny. "I will have dinner down here—ow, wow !"

Mr. Woodleigh, very red in the face, was about to launch forth into anathemas on the head of Johnny, when he caught his wife's eye, and subsided into a mild cough.

"Let him have dinner with us, poor boy," pleaded Mrs. Woodleigh.

"But he has had dinner, my dear, with Mary and the nurse."

"Oh, dear !—let him have another, poor

child!—he would not cry if he did not want something!"

So Johnny remained: a chair was placed for him by the side of me, and Johnny mounted thereon and looked round triumphantly. Johnny was a great care to me during the progress of dinner, and I had to keep a sharp look-out, lest he should drop something on my new black dress trousers and ruin them for ever. He was an observant boy, too, and watched every action of mine with an intentness that kept me red in the face all dinner time. Once or twice his father told him sharply to mind what he was about, but his mother immediately took his part, and wondered how Mr. Woodleigh could snap the child like that for nothing. He was quite a wet blanket to all enjoyment. He troubled his father's mind seriously, and caused him to make wrong cuts in the haunch of mutton. It was a dinner without any style about it; there was no attempt at ceremony or display—the Woodleighs did not ape the manners of people in a higher sphere. The dinner was a good one, and comprised several courses; but there

were no servants in livery to flit in the background, as I had dreaded and Mr. Markingham had prepared me for. Two maid-servants waited on the family, and were prompt in their attendance, and they did not frighten me very much, though it was a long while before I got used to them. There was no formality, and there was a great deal of talking; everybody seemed anxious to set me at my ease. It was the table of a tradesman who was humble and gave himself no airs, though a table covered with fine linen, and with every fork and spoon thereon impressed with the Hall mark.

Dinner was half over when the door opened, and cousin Dick made his long-looked for appearance. Cousin Dick was not there every-day, and was consequently somebody to be petted and made much of.

"Here's Dick at last!" cried Upton.

"Here's my big brother!" shouted Johnny, endeavoring, in the impulse of the moment, to scramble over the table and the haunch of mutton towards him. The sisters received him with smiles, and Mrs. Woodleigh, for

a moment looked thirty-five again. Paterfamilias was the only person who preserved his wonted aspect.

"It's very hard, Dick," he said, "you can't come down to dinner in time. I have not waited for you, sir."

"Beg pardon, governor, but the fact is, I was terribly knocked up last night," said Dick; "glad you have not waited—hate to keep anybody waiting. Ah! Robert," with an easy nod towards me—"heard you were coming, hope you're well. And, mother, how are you this morning?"

"About the same, Richard."

"I need not ask everybody else—everybody seems blooming. Don't move, Miss Bowden—thank you."

He took the vacant chair next Miss Bowden, and, leaning back therein, quietly waited to be attended to.

I sat and watched him, and thought he was a son of whom a mother might be proud.

He was a young man of two-and-twenty, tall, well-made, strikingly handsome, and on very good terms with himself—there was not

a doubt on that last point. Still, although he was as fine a young fellow as one would meet in a day's walk, yet there was something in his manner that I did not admire, and for which, at that time, I could not account. He hardly seemed a relation, and I could scarce fancy he was the cousin Dick of ten years ago, the dark-haired, pale stripling whom his mother had been so anxious about because he was growing so fast out of everything! I did not like his eyes, though they were large, dark, and sleepy as a Circassian's, for there was a depth in them which gave no index to his character; they were not those clear, fathomable, truth-telling eyes of which a few simple-hearted people in the world are the happy possessors. His small mouth, too, suggested the strange thought to me that it should have belonged to Miss Bowden! whilst the sharply-cut lips of Miss Bowden, so expressive of decision and energy, would not have been out of place under the Grecian nose of Dick Woodleigh, and would have certainly stamped his face with a more masculine character. And yet there was not much of

woman's nature, weakness, or indecision in him.

I observed a great deal that afternoon in a little time, and under difficult circumstances; for when the dessert was on the table, there was cousin Johnny on one side making havoc with some expensive strawberries; and there was cousin Constance on the other to chat with when I grew less embarrassed.

It was a pleasant day I was spending; I was heartily welcome there; I was neither patronized nor made too much of, and, not being a very bashful boy, I soon got over the novelty of my position.

I thought a great deal of Mr. Markingham during the dessert—his warning never left me; every time Constance smiled or spoke to me, "Take care of that cousin!" was ringing in my ears. I caught myself smiling once or twice at the absurdity of the late remarks of Mr. Markingham; it was foolish to think I should ever fall in love with a rich cousin, and much more ridiculous to dream of one so young and pretty being impressed by so hobbledehoy a being as myself. Seventeen

next month looks higher than growing youths who sit uncomfortable in their first surtouts—boys with no prospects, too! Ha! ha! what a good joke, to be sure! I was thinking of that cousin after the ladies and Johnny—thank heaven, Johnny!—had left the dessert and the wine to the gentlemen, when cousin Dick came to my side of the table with a cigar in his mouth, and took the seat which his sister Constance had vacated.

"Well, Bob Woodleigh, how long have you honored the city of London with your presence?"

"More than two years now, Richard."

"Upton tells me you are in the counting-house of the Woodleigh establishment—dull work, isn't it?"

"There is not much variety in the occupation, but I like it very well; I have no right to dislike it."

"You don't go at it with my brother Upton's fervor. I wonder work don't kill him!"

"Don't you work hard in your line of business, Dick?" cried Upton, who had overheard the remark.

"Oh! yes, of course I do," replied Dick, with an odd twitch at the corner of his mouth.

Mr. Woodleigh, who was paring an apple, stopped, looked suspiciously at his son, and then said very gravely, perhaps a little satirically :—

"Not a doubt of it, I should say."

Dick said nothing in reply, and uncle Woodleigh, after he had eaten his apple and taken another glass of wine, exchanged his chair for a couch near the fire-place and dropped into a refreshing slumber.

"How do you get on with my father, Bob?" asked Richard Woodleigh, in a low tone.

"Very well."

"It's precious strange that everybody can hit the right humor of the governor and get on 'very well' with him, except the eldest son," he muttered, staring hard at the decanters.

"Hollo, Dick!" exclaimed Upton, his eyes widening to a considerable extent. "What's the matter—has anything gone wrong?"

"No, no," responded Dick, pulling another chair towards him and resting his legs thereon; "it's nothing particularly wrong, Uppy, my boy. It's the old complaint—the governor thinks I spend too much money, as if a gentleman can live at college on 'how-d'ye-do's' and 'good mornings!'"

"Certainly he can't," chimed in Upton, glancing at his sleeping parent; "and I daresay it *is* expensive living till you have won your degrees, and are legally qualified for the Church. I do look forward to that day, Dick, upon my word."

"Oh! I shall give it up if I am to be always preached at when I want a few pounds," said Dick, keeping his eyes on his father's face, as though he were studying it. "I shall throw everything overboard and go for a soldier—I'm rather hasty, you know."

"Oh! father will talk differently to-morrow."

"No, he won't—besides, I have made up my mind. I'll run into debt, everybody else does at Oxford, and it all comes right in the end."

"How?" asked Upton, quietly.

"Oh! somehow. Taking bills, renewing them on an increased per-centage, putting your name to any piece of paper you are asked to sign—it is astonishing, my dear Upton, how the money rolls in upon that principle."

"And it *is* astonishing, my dear Dick, how soon the money stops rolling, and how the gentleman who has been signing every piece of paper keeps on rolling in his turn, for ever and ever, down, *down*, DOWN!"

Upton energetically rapped the table thrice with his wine-glass, and the third time broke the stem and spilt the wine over the table-cover. He blushed at his vehemence, and said testily:—

"That's all through you, Dick, talking nonsense, and putting me into a bad temper. You know the governor means well enough, and will do anything in reason."

"The governor is getting so horribly ill-tempered, Upton, there's no reasoning with him; it's a misery to talk to him."

"Pooh!" said his younger brother.

"It's a fact. Why, even mother spoke to him this morning about my affairs, and he snapped her up and made her almost ill."

"How much do you want?" asked Upton. "Sunday's not exactly the day to discuss money matters, but as something seems to be preying on your mind—out with it. It's no secret, I suppose?" with a glance at me.

"Shall I join the ladies?" said I, rising.

"No, no," cried Dick; "there's no occasion, George, Bob, or whatever your name is. I don't mind you; you don't know anybody of my set, that's certain."

"No," I answered, favoring cousin Dick with a look that was far from amiable, as I resumed my seat.

"I only want seventy pounds till my allowance turns up again, Upton—that's the week after next. Its not much, is it?

"Thirty-five pounds a-week for a single man is rather a lot of money to rattle through, *I* think."

"I'm not going to spend it on myself," said

Dick; "there are some new books to pay for, and my tailor, and I owe a young chum of mine twenty pounds—he went home to his mother's funeral a month or two ago though, and has not returned yet."

"Is that Lord Baughton's son?"

"No; it's young Heberdeen, a fellow you know nothing of."

"Heberdeen!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, and" turning to his brother, "I am really trying to get out of debt as fast as I can, you see, Upton."

"I'll lend you the seventy, Dick."

"Thank you, Uppy—what a blessing it is to have a good-natured brother who is of a saving turn of mind."

"My savings are not large, Dick."

"They will be some day," replied his brother, "when it's Woodleigh and Son, you will have the pull of me, or I am very much mistaken. Sometimes I wish I had taken to trade, dusty ledgers, melancholy-mad looking counting-houses, and continual penance on a high stool, for it's a paying speculation, and what is the good of position if you have no

money in your pockets to maintain it in style."

Dick yawned, stretched himself, took up another cigar, looked at it, and put it down again. There was a long pause, and my cousin Upton, who had suddenly turned thoughtful, made no effort to break the silence.

Dick, after yawn No. 2, abandoned his seat, walked to the looking-glass over the mantel-piece, and fell into attitude before it. After an admiring stare at his handsome face, he arranged his neck-tie, ran his fingers through his hair, smiled at himself in an affectionate manner, and then, satisfied in mind, turned his back to the fire and whistled.

"I say, Upton," he said at last.

"What is it?" answered Upton, moodily.

"You don't repent trusting me?"

"Trusting *you*, Dick—no!"

"You look so precious thoughtful, that—"

"I wasn't thinking of the money," interrupted Upton; "I'd lend you seven hundred if I had got it."

"I wish you had, Uppy! Not that I'd

borrow it," he added quickly; "but you are such an easy, good sort of a chap that you deserve all the good the gods can bestow."

He returned to the table, filled his glass, and made a sign to me to imitate his example.

"I have much pleasure in proposing Upton Woodleigh's health. Long life to him, prosperity to the partnership *in futuro*—for he's a jolly good fellow!"

Richard Woodleigh and I drank his health, and Upton rose with an odd smile.

"Gentlemen, for the favor you have done me—thankee. Have the kindness to charge your glasses again, I have a friend's health to propose. Mr. Woodleigh, senior!"

We three drank it with due honor.

"Dick," his eyes sparkling, "return thanks, you scamp. The governor is asleep, and you, as the heir of Grove House, are bound to respond. Now out with the truth and don't backbite your own father, as you have been nearly doing this afternoon. The truth, and shame the devil and Dick Woodleigh!"

Dick Woodleigh returned thanks, launched into encomiums on his father's virtues and abilities, and sat down with a "Bravo, Dick," from his brother ringing in his ears.

After that came "The Ladies," proposed by Richard Woodleigh, and then Richard Woodleigh's health proposed by myself.

Unaccustomed to imbibe so freely, I began to hope there was an end to toasts and sentiments, before there was an end to me under the table.

"Talking of ladies," remarked Dick, "how Miss Bowden has improved—she's lost that hard sphinxy look since I last saw her. Do you remember how I used to tease her, Upton?"

Upton laughed.

"What an amusement it was to see her fire up and talk of going away, once a-day, at least! Is she as jealous as ever?"

"Almost," answered Upton.

"I hear Miss Clewly's gone," said Richard; "what is that for?"

"I hardly know—she went yesterday—something about Mary."

"Miss Bowden's a nice girl; if I were you, Upton—"

He stopped.

"What?" asked Upton.

"Nothing—shall we adjourn to the drawing-room?"

"There is one more health to propose, I think, now we are in a toasting humor," said Upton; "and etiquette won't let us overlook it. Now then."

Glasses filled again, and Upton on his legs.

"I propose the health of a friend of mine with some of the Woodleigh's hot blood in his veins—a friend of mine who is working for the Woodleigh cause. A friend," with his characteristic twinkle of the eye, "who requires only a *leetle* more ballast to be all that is steady and business-like. Cousin Robert's health!"

Queer little party of wine-bibbers; what a long while ago it seems since those healths were drunk in the dining-room, and uncle Woodleigh was sleeping on the couch! How opinions have changed since that time, and

how differently we think of each other, now we have drifted each his own way, and the waters have risen and swamped one or two of us! Which?—cousin Dick, cousin Upton, or cousin Bob Woodleigh?

END OF VOL. I.

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